The Bethlem Tapestry, featuring the work of patients at the Bethlem Royal Hospital’s Psychosis Unit, will be unveiled in a new exhibition for World Mental Health Day 2010.

Led by artist Mark McGowan, the tapestry project involved patients, staff, volunteers and carers will be on display at the Bethlem Gallery.

The exhibition is the culmination of a six-month collaborative project initiated by Dr Sukhi Shergill, Consultant Psychiatrist to the Bethlem’s Psychosis Unit.

The tapestry is comprised of images and text made by the participants depicting experiences, thoughts and feelings in their daily lives over the period of the project and will be permanently installed on the ward for the long-term enjoyment of patients, visitors and staff.

The tapestry is a contemporary take on the traditional methods of woven cloth. It is roughly 10 meters long and consists of four panels of printed silk incorporating the material generated throughout the project.

Well-known London performance artist, Mark McGowan is also a former patient of the Bethlem Royal Hospital, having spent time at the hospital between 1992 and 1998.

Mark described the tapestry project as an opportunity to give something back to the Bethlem Royal Hospital, part of the South London & Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM).

“I was very ill and came to SLaM in a really bad state. As a patient I was given access to the arts facilities and never looked back.”

Since leaving the Bethlem, Mark went on to complete an art degree and now teaches at Chelsea & Camberwell Colleges of Art, having travelled the world through his art projects.

“None of this would have been possible without the help and support I was given while a patient at the Bethlem. I wanted to create a special body of work that I hope lives on at the Bethlem for years to come.”

Mark produced the tapestry in the Bethlem’s Psychosis Unit along with patients, carers, staff and outside volunteers and artists. Mark said patients and staff found the experience both rewarding and challenging, “The patients were able to engage, collaborate, take part, feel rewarded and inspired.”

Dr Shergill, who initiated the project, said it has received widespread praise from staff and patients alike, “Not only is it a hit with the patients, but I have been heartened to see it being shared by carers attending the ward, and also by staff.”

Dr Shergill said the tapestry project was in tune with recent National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines on treating psychosis which highlight the benefits of art therapies for patients, not only in enhancing creative expression, but also in initiating dialogue and helping build confidence.

Ken, a patient on the Psychosis Unit, said the project made him feel happier and more relaxed, “Anyone was welcome to join in, we had something to do, something productive using the imagination.”
The exhibition coincides with World Mental Health Day on 10 October 2010. Running since 1992, World Mental Health Day aims to promote greater public awareness and understanding of mental health and mental illness.

Senior Occupational Therapist Danielle Underwood worked enthusiastically to promote the vision of the project amongst patients and colleagues and to ensure the smooth running of the weekly sessions within the ward environment. She described feeling “inspired and privileged to see the vast creative talent of all involved.”

Pamela Jacobson, a Clinical Psychologist within the National Psychosis Unit, said the creative groups had been very beneficial to patients, “They have given people an opportunity to feel involved and to produce something which will be valued.”

The tapestry project was assisted by the unit’s successful volunteering programme that helps to facilitate groups and activities which would not otherwise take place.

Exhibition details:
Opening Event: 22nd September, 3 - 6pm
Exhibition continues: 23rd September - 15th October
Opening times: Wed, Thurs, Friday, 11am – 6pm
(including Saturday 9th October 11am - 6pm, celebrating World Mental Health Day 2010)
Address: The Bethlem Gallery, Bethlem Royal Hospital, Monks Orchard Road, Beckenham, Kent BR3 3BX
Travel: Nearest British Rail: Eden Park / East Croydon
Contact: Beth Elliott, Gallery Co-ordinator, 020 3228 4835
Email: thebethlemgallery@gmail.com
Website: www.bethlemgallery.com

Notes to editors:
- The Bethlem Gallery provides a showcase for the inspirational talents of mental health service user artists through professional exhibitions, residencies and events. We promote access and participation within arts and health settings and campaign for greater awareness of mental health problems whilst challenging negative perceptions of mental health.
- Bethlem Royal Hospital, South London & Maudsley NHS Trust is the oldest psychiatric hospital in the world and is a provider of mental health and substance misuse services for people locally and specialist services for people from across the U.K.
- One in six people - about 10 million people in the UK - are affected by a mental health problem at any one time (The Office for National Statistics).
- Visit our National Services website at www.national.slam.nhs.uk for further information on SLaM’s psychosis services and Dr Shergill
- Interviews with the artists can be arranged.
- High resolution jpegs of the tapestry available.