

## ➔ A Resident's Experience

While visiting a community group in January 2016, Healthwatch Croydon met Anthony, a resident with Multiple Sclerosis (MS).

Anthony feels strongly, through experience over several years that the public and medical profession alike simply 'don't understand mental health'.

By virtue of having MS Anthony has a mental health problem - which has not been recognised. If there is no recognition, he wonders 'how can people be helped, or signposted to services which may assist'? He is disheartened that nobody is 'getting to grips or willing to understand' and this lack of awareness and support is widespread and affects many.

## When is Medication Appropriate?

Anthony feels that the government's talk of mental health 'being placed on the same footing as physical health' is a mere gesture and their heart, not to mention funding, is not behind a real change.



Medication is 'not always the best option'

He suspects that drug companies wield substantial power within the NHS and government, which perhaps 'has some bearing on medication being applied', where perhaps other treatments and therapies may be considered.

Recently he experienced this himself - having to decline the offer of anti-depressants from his doctor. Talking therapy would have been preferred.

**“A lack of awareness and support.”**

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## ➔ Perpetual Stigma...

Walking with a stick, Anthony can find it difficult to get around, yet people say 'if you have MS, where's your wheelchair then'? He has even experienced this attitude at the MS Society itself, where he had to justify his attendance.



Some people with MS can appear 'normal'

Some of these experiences leave him 'feeling irate and agitated', but not being understood or listened to, constantly, is not easy to deal with.

Anthony has befriended somebody he met at the MS Society - she has an 'associated condition' that mimics the symptoms of MS. While accompanying her to hospital she urges the staff to talk to him also as he can provide insight, but in every instance they cite confidentiality and refuse. He just wants to offer advice, which may help out, but he is always 'cut off in mid-sentence and never able to explain'. This goes 'on and on'.

**“Is it really so hard for people to listen?”**

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This is the whole problem - Anthony is not being listened to, whether at the hospital, or the GP. He 'just wants someone to confirm what he is feeling - some kind of proof of his mental health condition that he can take back to his family'. Because of the lack of understanding he has taken to self-medicating, which has done him 'the world of good'. He says people have good reason to be weary of anti-depressants and other psychotic drugs, some people are given additional drugs 'merely to combat side effects'! is it really so hard for people to listen?