

Better by triage car – praise for our new partnership with police

We have launched a new service, working with the police

A mental health nurse goes out with police in a car, and helps other officers by phone

An evening shift

Paul Widdowfield, communications manager with LPT spent an evening shift in the custody suite at Euston Street Police Station, Leicester, where the triage car team is based, shadowing mental health practitioner Lisa McDonald and PC Dave Wadsworth.

There is strong teamwork between Dave and Lisa. Working out of a small room in the custody suite, they work with police and NHS databases running on computers alongside each other.

On this shift, it transpired that there was only one call which necessitated a visit. A call came in from another police officer which outlined how a male had sat down on a petrol station forecourt and was refusing to move. The duo went out to see the man, and assessed that the policing element was the best way of handling him. He was taken to Euston Street for further questioning.

Although this was a relatively quiet night, Lisa and Dave were kept busy providing advice to colleagues over the telephone, and also in the custody suite. As this is still a pilot scheme, there are occasions where mental health assessments might need to be carried out in the custody suite itself.

An innovative partnership with Leicestershire Police, which aims to provide mental health care as soon as possible and potentially reduce offending, has been praised as an example of best practice by the Department of Health.

Operating as a pilot since January 2013, our triage car scheme sees mental health practitioners (MHP) go with police officers to incidents where someone might need immediate mental health support.

Since the pilot started, the triage car has seen a reduction in the number of people detained under Section 136 of the Mental Health Act of around 40 per cent, and is saving the partner organisations £9,700 a month.

Under Section 136, when the police believe that someone is suffering from a mental illness and needs immediate treatment or care, they can take them from a public place to a 'place of safety', either for their own protection or the protection of others, so their immediate needs

can be properly assessed.

The aim of the triage car is to identify and provide care or support that can potentially reduce or stop offending or self-harming. Because our staff are able to assess and signpost people more effectively in the community, they are able to reduce the stress on that person at a time of crisis.

The police officer can give expert advice on possible policing solutions, while the mental health nurse helps when specialist advice or care is needed. Our staff can either travel with police in the triage car, or advise other officers by phone.

This helps to stop people with a mental health crisis from having to receive their initial care or be detained in a police custody suite, which can be very distressing.



PC Dave Wadsworth and LPT mental health nurse Vicki Noble – telephone triage is also part of the pilot

It also means people receive the treatment they need much faster, as well as reducing demands on police time.

Leicestershire triage car officer, PC Alex Crisp, said: "Practically the team regularly deals with individuals at the point of mental crisis, often in very risky circumstances. Incidents are resolved by the collective skills and experience of both of the professionals involved, an example of how partnership working can produce the best results.

"The professional attitude and work ethic of the mental health practitioners shows the very best of the NHS and its staff. The team of practitioners have earned the respect of the police officers they work with and produced results for the individuals they have responded to that wouldn't have been possible without their input."

Paul Miller, our chief operating officer, says: "The triage car demonstrates how, through partnership work and creative thinking, members of the public can be better served through providing care in the right places. We really value our partnership with the police force, and with other agencies in our wider criminal justice work."

The initiative is attracting a lot of attention, with several police forces and mental health trusts contacting LPT to find out more. After visiting Leicestershire, Care and Support Minister Norman Lamb, from the Department of Health, announced more police forces have been selected to pilot similar schemes.



Triage car teamwork: mental health professional Emma McCann and PC Alex Crisp

How are skills and powers combined?

Having professionals from both health and policing backgrounds working closely together means each incident and its options can be considered more broadly than if police were at an incident alone. It also means the decision makers can gain access to and share previous police and health service records concerning the individual.

The mental health nurse:

- provides the training, experience and legal powers of a registered nurse
- can conduct a mental health assessment
- has mobile access to mental health services and information systems
- has experience of working practices and procedures within the NHS

The police officer:

- provides the training, experience and legal powers of a constable. These include powers under criminal law, the Mental Health Act and the Mental Capacity Act
- has mobile access to criminal justice information systems
- has experience of working practices and procedures within the criminal justice system
- has been trained in public order and methods for gaining entry to locked or barricaded premises, providing additional tactical options
- is qualified to higher driving standards, enabling emergency response if required

