

Title: Addressing the Crisis in UK Adult ADHD Services

Neurohaven Overview (May 2024)

Introduction: UK adult ADHD services are facing a crisis, with long waiting times and a growing demand for treatment. This problem has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite efforts to expand specialist services, resources haven't kept up, leading to extended waiting times and fragmented care. This situation has serious consequences for individuals and society as a whole.

Understanding the Issue: Over the last two decades, there's been a better understanding of ADHD and effective treatments. However, the number of people seeking help has increased, creating a strain on services. Even though more specialist services have been established, they haven't been adequately funded, leading to long waiting lists.

Challenges Faced: The waiting times for ADHD assessments are shockingly long, sometimes stretching to several years. This means that people at the back of the queue might wait even longer than reported. The lack of clear targets and national data exacerbates the problem, leaving solutions in the hands of local authorities.

Impact of Underfunding: Underfunding has led to the rise of independent providers, which, while offering relief to some, adds complexity to the system. This fragmentation makes it hard for patients and healthcare providers to navigate. Additionally, it can lead to duplicated assessments and treatment disruptions.

The Urgency of Treatment: Untreated ADHD can have serious consequences, including accidents, comorbidities like anxiety and depression, and even increased mortality and suicide rates. Delayed access to treatment not only affects individuals and families but also burdens social care, healthcare, and the justice system.

Proposed Solutions:

1. **Status Quo:** Maintaining the current system isn't viable, as waiting lists will continue to grow, affecting patient care and straining resources.
2. **Enhanced Funding:** While direct, increasing funding significantly may not be feasible given budget constraints.
3. **Improve System Efficiency:** Streamlining diagnostic and treatment pathways, possibly through technology, could help reduce waiting times.
4. **Alter Service Provision:** Shifting some responsibilities to primary or secondary care could ease the burden on specialist services, but it requires significant investment and training.
5. **Clinical Prioritization:** Limiting access to services based on severity is controversial and poses ethical and practical challenges.

Recommendations:

- Agreed standards for assessments and reports can improve consistency across providers.
- Setting a national target for ADHD waiting times could focus attention on the issue.
- A national strategy for ADHD would raise awareness and guide funding decisions.
- Additional funding is urgently needed to meet the growing demand for ADHD services.

Conclusion:

UK adult ADHD services are struggling to cope with increasing demand and limited resources. While alternative models and improved efficiency may provide some relief, substantial changes require additional funding and a shift in approach. Setting national targets and standards could help keep ADHD treatment a priority in healthcare policy.