

7

minute briefing

Ben



Background

Ben was 39 years old at the time of his death. He was well educated and had been active in local politics. Ben moved to Croydon but kept his GP registration in another borough.

Ben was brought to the attention of social care and health services by his friends who were concerned that he was neglecting himself. Ben initially said that he would accept help from social and mental health services, but then cancelled or did not attend appointments. Ben also assured practitioners that he would seek help when he needed it despite mounting evidence that he did not do this and that he was self-neglecting. In response to lack of contact from Ben, mental health services closed his case. Ben did not give the correct contact details for his GP and so services in Croydon were unaware of any concerns about Ben's physical and mental health needs.

Concerned that they had not seen Ben for several weeks, Ben's friends contacted the police who forced entry into Ben's home. Ben was found in a state of self-neglect and hoarding. Ben was admitted to hospital where it was found that he had several health conditions associated with prolonged extensive use of alcohol. There was hope initially that Ben would recover but his condition deteriorated and he died in hospital. Ben's cause of death was hepatic encephalopathy, a neuropsychiatric syndrome caused by liver failure.

Key Learning

- Do not be assured that just because someone gives the impression that they are professional and can talk in the same way as you can about services, they are able to seek help if they need it. Ben was able to dissuade professionals from enquiring further. Remember to be curious!
- Research shows that substance use is often one of the factors associated with self-neglect. It is important to suspect and investigate its presence, even if there is no immediate evidence. Ben was found to have used alcohol in large quantities for a long time, but this was not discovered until the police forced entry into his flat and he was admitted to hospital.
- When working with people who self-neglect, always consider and assess their mental capacity to make decisions about, for example, making contact with, or accepting support from, services. Consider what might be influencing their decisions including shame, embarrassment and the impact of long-term alcohol use, substance dependency or traumatic experiences. Remember to take all practicable steps to help them to be able to make decisions and to understand the relevant information.
- Respond to situations where people who self-neglect do not turn their decisions into actions. These might indicate impairments in executive functioning and executive decision making. Ben told social and mental health services that he would accept help or attend appointments. However, Ben then refused entry, cancelled or did not attend appointments. This form of non-engagement is a warning sign that you may need to adopt a more assertive multi-agency approach.

Key Learning Continued

- Remember that self-neglect is also an adult safeguarding concern. No safeguarding concerns were raised about Ben. A safeguarding concern may have prompted multi-agency information sharing about Ben and attempts to contact him. It might have led to the identification of the risks of Ben having a GP in another borough and of his refusal of services. It may have prompted escalation to the Croydon Risk and Vulnerability Multi-Agency Panel.
- Use face-to-face visits when working with people who self-neglect and be aware of smells or sights, for example, which might contradict the impression the person is trying to give you that they are managing and can keep themselves safe.
- Work with the friends and family of people who self-neglect. They may be able to engage when you cannot or notify you of increasing risks. Ben's friends were very concerned about him to the extent that they by-passed social and mental health services and asked the police to force entry to Ben's flat. Ben was found in a state of severe self-neglect and was admitted to hospital because of this action. Consider what might have happened if Ben's friends had not done this.
- Use the NHS Spine system to check GP registration if you do not have contact details. GPs can provide essential information to inform risk assessment and are a vital partner in any interventions with people who self-neglect.



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