

Fighting for mental health

Emma Corlett (UNISON, Norfolk & Suffolk)

In 2012 our mental health services in Norfolk and Suffolk were cut. Too much emphasis was placed on balancing the books and not enough on quality of services. In January 2013 our branch of UNISON wrote to the Care Quality Commission and to every MP in Norfolk to say there was a beds crisis, people's lives were put at risk and staff felt they were not operating within the law.

There was no response from the CQC and no MP acknowledged or responded. We told Normal Lamb (a Norfolk MP) about the cuts in his constituency in the summer of 2013. Death rates continued to rise. Staff were scape-goated. We called a public meeting in November 2013. Over 300 people turned up.

The trust management stuck their heads in the sand. They tried to discredit us. They described it as a 'so-called bed crisis'. They went into complete denial. We used FOI requests, we worked closely with *Community Care* magazine and the national media to explain what was happening.

In April 2014 a group of staff and patients walked 44 miles to highlight what was happening. In February of last year the CQC put our trust into special measures.

Our budgets were out of control. Staff were made redundant. A few months later, there were over 300 patients in the community with no allocated worker. There was no maternity unit so then our services were not safe so we had to bring in agency staff.

Throughout last year, my trust was spending between £2 and £2.5 million a month on temporary staffing. We have patients sent to Brighton, Manchester, Weston-Super-Mare, Leeds and Liverpool. From Norfolk. Our local newspaper calls it the map of shame.

Keep putting freedom of information requests in.