

## 'Creating Health and Wellbeing: Through Creative Endeavour (s) -5th February 2020



Dr Shadreck Mwale (Brighton and Sussex Medical School) working with colleagues, Dr Jo Hope and Dr Chris Allen (both at the University of Southampton) organised a BSA South Coast Medical Sociology regional symposium 'Creating Health and Wellbeing: through creative endeavours' which took place on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2020. The University of Southampton hosted the event. The symposium brought together two researchers and a community worker to discuss Public Patient Involvement in Public Health and research.

Dr Louise Baxter -[MARCH Network](#) (University College London), presented a paper titled 'Transforming our understanding of how social, cultural and community assets can support our mental health'. *The March Network is one of 8 National networks funded by the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) as part of the 2018 Cross-Council Mental Health Plus funding to advance research into mental health. The MARCH Network focuses on social, cultural and community assets- which include the arts, culture, heritage sites, libraries, green space, community centres, social clubs and volunteer groups; and their role in enhancing public mental health and wellbeing, preventing mental illness and supporting those living with mental health conditions. The MARCH network proposes that these Assets build Resilient Communities and therefore lie at the heart of Mental Health (M-ARC-H).* Her paper presented preliminary findings from research activities in the first year of the Networks' launch- these include:

1. A consensus exercise to identify evidence gaps in the field,
2. A Citizen Science project in conjunction with the BBC to understand the barriers and facilitators of creative participation in the general population, and
3. Large-scale qualitative studies examine the barriers and facilitators to participation in social, cultural and community assets, for people with lived experience, for the community and voluntary sector.

The findings identified barriers and enablers for community groups working with people with mental illness. While support from public institutions such as GP practices leads to public involvement in such activities, community groups face the challenge of financial support. The paper highlighted tensions between social prescribing and available resources community

services. However, seeing the impact of their services and positive public views motivated such groups to persist. The paper raised questions about responsibility for social prescribing and financial support for the community groups.

Meanwhile, Dr Cindy Brooks (University of Southampton) presented a paper 'Exploring the relationship between attendance of a local art activity upon participant perceptions of their health, wellbeing and identity.' The paper explored the increasing appreciation of artistic and creative practices in enhancing health, wellbeing and quality of life. The paper illustrated how, despite this appreciation, the potential benefits of such practices remain contingent on their availability, accessibility and individual/societal engagement and involvement. The paper drew on preliminary findings from participatory ethnographic research, to examine the relationships between regular attendance of a local art activity upon participation perceptions and experiences of their health, wellbeing and identity. The findings suggested that participants in the art-based project found the art as useful for their wellbeing and provided much needed social interconnections and space to focus on a single task. However, participants had to managed interactions within the venue such as those feelings of self-doubt about one's ability to be 'an artist' or welcome in the space; coupled with environmental factors such as the open space in which meetings are held allowing anyone one to wander in. Though a voluntary project, the paper raised questions about whether social prescribing could help increase public engagement.

The last speaker was Rebecca Kinge ([Southampton collective](#)) presented her work with the Southampton Collective and facilitated a workshop on creative public engagement. The Southampton Collective is a community interest group that was formed in 2016. It aims to facilitate for creativity, fairness, sustainability, resilient communities, grassroots-led action, inclusivity a greener and more locally-owned economy. Drawing on the NHS constitution- "Nothing about us without us" Southampton collective focuses on co-production by ensuring public involvement and patient voices in health service delivery. The talk highlighted activities supported by Southampton collective ranging from Breathing Spaces- a project on poor air quality to organising Ted Talks in collaboration with local theatre and artists. They also provide space for providing for sharing ideas to help people and local authorities identify pressing local health concerns. Of particular significance is their work with [So-Linked](#), a social prescribing organisation that links community organisations and the healthcare-seeking public. The paper gave examples of social prescribing and networking between the public and community organisations. Lastly, Rebecca got the attendees to design a community engagement activity for a community festival.

Throughout the presentations, the theme of social prescribing run through. It straddled tensions between individual and community, community and institutions, individual/community and state responsibility, equality and exclusion. The presentations illuminated how social prescribing often relies on poorly funded community projects run by volunteers. The papers highlighted how social prescribing can be appealing in a policy context privileging individual responsibility for state involvement and obligations in healthcare. It would appear that responsibility for health is overly focused on the individual and the community rather than the state.

On the other hand, the talks highlighted the mutual benefits that can be derived from community and University collaborations. While community organisations require support to monitor and review their activities, Sociologists are interested in accessing communities served by community organisations for research. Therefore, working together can result in mutual benefit and the conduct of beneficial public sociology.

Though the subject of the event did not align directly with the EPPiGEN project, the focus on creative methodologies is of interest to our project, as we are interested in developing innovative ways of conducting research and ensuring public involvement.

