

PE1627/B

Scottish Youth Parliament Letter of 10 February 2017

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) does not have specific policy on the issue this petition relates to, i.e. on whether parents or guardians should be consulted and provide consent before medication is prescribed on mental health conditions if a patient is under the age of 18.

Regrettably, we are therefore not able to express a formal stance on what the views of young people are on this specific issue at this time, as we have not gathered those views.

However, we have identified some related issues from our existing policy and research that we believe are relevant and that we hope may assist the Committee in establishing the views of young people on this issue.

Firstly, as a rights based organisation, SYP is a firm supporter of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12 of the CRC states:

“States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”¹

We are concerned that the proposal outlined in the petition is likely to be regressive with regards to this Article, as it would effectively deny 16 and 17 year olds the right to make decisions for themselves about their mental health.

Secondly, the Committee may be aware that our current annual campaign, called Speak Your Mind, focuses on young people’s mental health.

Our research into young people’s awareness and experience of mental health information, support, and services suggests that implementing the proposal outlined in the petition could place an additional barrier to young people seeking support or help for their mental health problems. While 55% of young people who responded said that they would feel comfortable talking to parents about their mental health, 23% said that they wouldn’t feel comfortable, with a further 19% saying they weren’t sure.² Young people were also asked what would stop them from talking to someone about their mental health, and identified a number of barriers, including embarrassment, a lack of understanding about mental health, but also a fear of having their confidentiality and privacy compromised.³ A number of young people explicitly mentioned that fear of their parents finding out would prevent them from talking to someone about their mental health.⁴

¹<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC-C-GC-12.pdf>

²[https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/scottishyouthparliament/pages/475/attachments/original/1467641786/SYP_MENTALHEALTH-REPORT_FINAL_2_\(1\).pdf?1467641786](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/scottishyouthparliament/pages/475/attachments/original/1467641786/SYP_MENTALHEALTH-REPORT_FINAL_2_(1).pdf?1467641786)

³[https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/scottishyouthparliament/pages/475/attachments/original/1467641786/SYP_MENTALHEALTH-REPORT_FINAL_2_\(1\).pdf?1467641786](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/scottishyouthparliament/pages/475/attachments/original/1467641786/SYP_MENTALHEALTH-REPORT_FINAL_2_(1).pdf?1467641786)

⁴Taken from unpublished data.

We believe that further action needs to be taken to ensure that young people are protected from tragic consequences when it comes to medication for mental health problems. In our research, young people themselves expressed concerns about the potentially dangerous effects of medication. However, we believe that a more effective means of ensuring protection for young people when it comes to medication involves an increased focus on social prescribing opportunities, either as an alternative to, or in complement with, medical interventions. SYP consultation and research has shown that young people favour lower-intensity, non-clinical, community-based support (such as peer-to-peer support, talking to youth workers, information centres, and counselling) as positive examples of mental health services.⁵ GP surgeries should provide age-appropriate information about local mental health support and services, with particular emphasis on young person-specific support. We note that the Scottish Government's draft Mental Health Strategy intends to introduce new models of supporting mental health in primary care, such as increasing the number of link workers and peer support workers, which we welcome. The move to a more community-based model of support is also in line with the following recommendation from the UN's Concluding Observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland:

"Support and develop therapeutic community-based services for children with mental health conditions."⁶

Finally, the Committee will be aware that we recently undertook a short consultation activity with a group of Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament to inform the Committee's consideration of the Armed Forces (School Visits) Petition (PE1603).

SYP would be happy to look into carrying out a similar exercise to this one on Petition PE1627, perhaps at our forthcoming Sitting on 25th and 26th March, to allow us to establish more clearly the views of young people on this issue.

⁵https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/scottishyouthparliament/pages/449/attachments/original/1461763333/Final_report-_mental_health_discussion_day.pdf?1461763333

⁶ <http://www.crae.org.uk/media/93148/UK-concluding-observations-2016.pdf>