Mental Health and Society: Seminars week 11
(That's the week commencing 9/12/2013)

The experience of caring for people who are 'mentally ill' - implications for care in the community

Reading:

There are a few papers to read for this, namely

Jeon, Y.H. & Madjar, I. (1998), Caring for a Family Member With Chronic Mental Illness, Qualitative Health Research, 8, (5), 694-706 this is available electronically at http://www.brown.uk.com/brownlibrary/jeon.pdf

Gray, B., Robinson,. C. Seddon, D. & Roberts, A. (2009) An emotive subject: insights from social, voluntary and healthcare professionals into the feelings of family carers for people with mental health problems, Health and Social Care in the Community, 17, (2): 125–132. http://www.brown.uk.com/brownlibrary/gray.pdf

Jones, I.R., Ahmed, N., Catty, J., McLaren, S., Rose, D. & Wykes, T. (2009) Illness careers and continuity of care in mental health services: A qualitative study of service users and carers, Social Science and Medicine, 69: 632-639. http://www.brown.uk.com/brownlibrary/jones.pdf

Pejlert, A. (2001) Being a parent of an adult son or daughter with severe mental illness receiving professional care: parents' narratives, Health and Social Care in the Community, 9, (4), 194–204. http://www.brown.uk.com/brownlibrary/pejlert.pdf

This seminar is intended as a 'standalone' session which does not relate to a specific lecture; instead it covers a theme that relates to many of the problems we're dealing with in the module. A good deal of day to day care for people with a variety of problems (from mild stress to florid psychosis) is done by family members, often parents or spouses.

This seminar will attempt to familiarise you with a qualitative approaches to doing research on family aspects of mental illness. One of the earlier seminar sessions was about institutional issues from a service user's point of view; this one is about what it's like for the family. At the end of this session we hope you have an appreciation of what it's like for families coping with a relative with mental health problems, and that you understand what we can learn from talking to families to enhance services, learn more about the social problems involved in 'mental disorder' and appreciate the point of view of family members who undertake the 'burden of care'.

In reading the material perhaps it would be worthwhile bearing the following questions in mind, which will provide the impetus for our discussion in the tutorial.

What is the process of caring for a family member with a mental illness like?

Are there any things which can be done to make the process of caring for a distressed or disturbed relative easier?

If you had to design educational materials of your own to assist families in dealing with what happens when one of them develops a 'mental illness' what would you tell them?

Does this article tell you anything about the problems of community care? What do they seem to be?

What additional services would be useful so as to help families?

Are there any additional problems in community care you can think of which the article leaves out?

How useful is work such as this, about phenomenological aspects of mental ill health for the families, in planning services for families with a mentally ill member?

One criticism which is sometimes aired about the provision of care for families is that it is very one way - from the professionals to the public. To what extent can service providers learn from family experiences?

What do you suppose the people in Jeon and Madjar's article would like to say to the professionals? Would the professionals be pleased to hear it?

Some of you might end up working in therapeutic contexts, as counsellors, clinical psychologists, mental health support workers and so on. How could you help resolve the problems that the articles highlight?

What advice would you give to someone contemplating caring for a family member with a mental health problem? Does it matter what kind of mental health problem the family member has? Are some easier to care for than others? Why or why not?