

## **ENMESH 2017 Groningen opening plenary**

**Professor Helen Killaspy**

**University College London**

### **Title**

**Complex individuals in a complex society; how complex needs services should be the quality benchmark for mental health care.**

### **Abstract**

The last fifty years have seen one of the greatest international social movements of all time – the closure of large institutions and the development of community based mental health care. Although many factors have been suggested as fuelling this process, one major driver was a change in society's attitude towards people with mental illness, away from exclusion and marginalisation towards inclusion and participation. The process of deinstitutionalisation has been largely judged a success, is ongoing in many countries and is strongly supported by international mental health policy. Alongside this humanitarian shift in mental health care, research has helped to identify the most effective interventions, understand how to deliver them, and shaped the process further. However, as our knowledge has increased, so our services have become more specialised, leading to fragmented, complex systems, often provided by multiple agencies, that are difficult to navigate. Increasingly, the focus has been on prevention, promotion and earlier intervention. In this context, many 'deinstitutionalised' countries have failed to attend adequately to the needs of those with the most complex and longer term mental health problems. With appropriate intervention and support, most people with complex needs can achieve, sustain and enjoy a successful and rewarding life in the community, but without it they are at risk of neglect and institutionalisation. If a society's greatness is measured by how it treats its most vulnerable, mental health care should be measured by the quality of its complex needs services.