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Association of British Paediatric Nurses Marks Mental Health Awareness Week and Calls for getting health care transition right for young people

The theme for Mental Health Awareness Week 2026 (11-17 May) is **Action.** The Association of British Paediatric Nurses (ABPN) is calling for action to **get healthcare transition right** for young people moving from children's to adult service in recognition of the profound impact this can have on mental health and wellbeing.

Transition is not a single event but a gradual, planned process that should begin early and be responsive to a young person's physical, emotional and psychosocial needs. When transition is rushed, delayed, poorly coordinated or unsupported, young people face increased risks of anxiety, disengagement from services and deterioration in mental wellbeing.

Recent evidence from the **NHS England Young Researchers: Healthcare Transition Report 2024–25** highlights significant and persistent gaps across the NHS. Key findings from the report include:

- Poor communication left many young people feeling lost and unprepared
- Insufficient mental health support increased vulnerability during a high-risk period
- Parent/carer(s) felt excluded from decisions despite their essential supportive role

Young people described the emotional impact of transition failures, reporting increased anxiety, fear and a sense of abandonment.

These findings closely align with the **Facing the Future: Standards for Children and Young People in Emergency Care (2025)**, which highlight rising presentations of mental health crises among children and young people, long waiting times for assessment, workforce pressures across Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and significant variation in access to timely, developmentally appropriate mental health support. Poorly managed transition is recognised as a key factor contributing to young people presenting in crisis to Emergency Departments.

Providing high-quality care to young people requires more than clinical excellence alone. Recognised psychosocial frameworks such as **HEEADSSSS(S)** (**Home**, **Education**/Employment, **Eating** and Exercise, **Activities**, **Drugs,** Alcohol, Vaping and Smoking, **Sexual Health**, Sexuality and Gender Identity, **Self-Harm** and Suicide, **Safety**, **Social Media** and Digital Technology and (**Sleep**) support clinicians to better understand the *context* of a young person's life, alongside their physical health needs.

The ABPN emphasises that:

- Psychosocial assessment provides a fuller understanding of young people's needs
- Physical health cannot be separated from emotional and mental wellbeing
- Each clinical encounter offers only a snapshot of a young person's wider life
- Consistency of approach enables trust, honest conversations and safer care
- Every interaction matters

Environments that are supportive and developmentally appropriate help young people feel safe, valued and able to engage.

Youth-friendly services, appropriate adjustments and professionals trained in adolescent-centred communication are essential to supporting mental wellbeing and preventing escalation into crisis.

To support this call, the newly published NHS England guidance, *Supporting young people to transition into adolescent and adult services*, provides a clear national framework for improving transition experiences and outcomes. It reinforces the need for early planning, coordinated care, and meaningful involvement of young people and their families. Children's nurses are central to bringing this guidance to life in everyday practice.

This Mental Health Awareness Week, the ABPN calls on children's nurses to lead the change: to champion developmentally appropriate care, to advocate for young people's voices to be heard, and to ensure that no young person feels lost in transition. Action starts in every interaction, every conversation and every service, because getting transition right is not optional, it is essential to protecting and promoting the mental health and wellbeing of the next generation.

Jessica Semedo, Roald Dahl Transition Nurse Specialist and Association of British Paediatric Nurses member says:

"Transition to adult services is a pivotal moment in a young person's life. When it is poorly managed, the consequences for mental health and long-term engagement with services can be profound. Children's nurses are often the first people young people meet, in Emergency Departments, during admissions or at routine clinic appointments. In everyday moments, through listening, consistency and compassion, we begin conversations that may not feel significant at the time. Even when answers do not come straight away, a seed is planted.

Trust is built over time. At the next interaction, that trust can make all the difference. Children's nurses hold more influence than they often realise. Every interaction matters, and through these moments we have the power to shape experiences, build confidence and change lives."

Notes for editors

- The term *child* refers to infants, children, young people and young adults up to 25 years of age.

- For the purposes of this press release, *young people* includes adolescents and young adults aged approximately **11–25 years**.
- The ABPN recognises the vital role of primary care, community services, school nursing, CAMHS, adult mental health services and Emergency Departments in supporting children, young people and families.
- The Association of British Paediatric Nurses is the oldest children's nursing association in the world, established in 1938, with members spanning clinical practice, education, leadership and research.

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