

## People In Mind: Lundbeck Italia & Ospedale San Paolo

Patients suffering from mental disorders often lose touch with their most intimate spaces as they know them once they are admitted to psychiatric units. Their homes where they see their families; their schools, universities and workspaces; as well as their favourite parks, bars and restaurants are detached from the confines of a hospital unit. When away from such people and places that are so important to our identities, it is easy to lose sense of who we are.

As patients of a psychiatry unit, there is a risk that people admitted to hospital for the treatment of mental disorders may see themselves as just another number; one of many cases of "unwell" people that are admitted, treated, and later sent home. Especially when using a diagnostic manual which diagnoses individuals with particular symptoms of mental disorders into fitting categories, patients may see themselves as being permanently labelled with one of these disorders. Some patients may see these labels as the reason as to why they have been admitted to a psychiatry unit, rather than an explanation as to why they need support during recovery.

Even after their period of recovery is completed, and they are released from the unit, stigmas can follow them as they try to reintegrate themselves in society. Often, people will see patients of Schizophrenia as "dangerous", or patients of bipolar disorder as "moody". Misconceptions such as these can create negative stigmas which prevent former patients from seeing themselves as individuals once more, creating a sticky label which may get in the way of them understanding their identity. Mostly, these misconceptions occur because the public lacks the knowledge of the effects of mental disorders, and lacks contact with someone who is experiencing them.

At the Ospedale San Paolo in Milan, the psychiatry unit lacks significant funding to create a space for patients with a stimulating environment. The hospital wings are decorated with walls, beds and windows, and not much else. The creativity room where patients can spend their free time is also void of funding, with only a handful of puzzles, paints and books for patients to use. The lack of there being a nurturing environment can lead patients to see themselves as one of the many "unwell" people of the unit, with an inability to express themselves for who they are.

This art project sought to give patients a platform to express themselves for who they are by using art, and reduce any stigmas which may accompany their labels. Four patients were given one square painting canvas each. Each corner of their canvases had 1/4 of a puzzle piece, and created a whole puzzle piece when fit together. Four patients took part, with a range of different diagnoses including schizophrenia, depression and bipolar disorder. Patients were then asked to paint what their mental disorder means to them, and how it makes them feel. To do this, they were provided with a blank canvas and as many art materials as possible which they felt that they needed, including watercolours, acrylic paints, felt tips, crayons and colouring pencils. Patients left the corner of the puzzle piece in their canvas blank, and afterwards, psychiatrists working at the ward painted what remained, in terms of what mental disorders means to them, and how it makes them feel.

During the painting session, patients and psychiatrists took time to express themselves and engage in conversation outside of the activities of conventional treatment. There was a space created where they could talk, listen to the radio, and express themselves on a painting for who they were. The works of art include poetry, detailed patterns of design, as well as symbolic representations of the self. When both patients and psychiatrists completed the canvases, the four corners of the four canvases were fitted together, completing the puzzle piece that had been made together in a work bridged between patients, and the psychiatrists who help their recovery. No matter who you are; a psychiatrist, a patient or even an outsider; we all see and stigmatise mental disorders differently. By working together, and sharing individual expressions of the self with others, we can work to reduce the negative effects of stigmas and labels, and solve the puzzle of what a mental disorder can look and feel like.







