Discussion: Improving physical health in people with mental illness

Dr Sheila Hardy: Educating primary care professionals about reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease in people with a mental illness

Background
Compared to the general population, people with a mental illness have a higher risk of developing cardiovascular disease. This is recognized by Public Health England, Health Education England and NHS England. Educating healthcare professionals caring for this group of people in primary care settings can increase the monitoring of this group, however these professionals have poor access to the appropriate education.

Context of the work by Charlie Waller Memorial Trust
Educational materials and a 'train the trainer' toolkit were commissioned by Health Education England and accredited by the Royal College of GPs and the Royal College of Nursing. The training is provided free of charge to primary care and other staff through the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust (https://www.cwmt.org.uk/practice-nurse-training). The 'train the trainer' education is offered by the charity as a preference to one off training because of its sustainability.

Outcomes and lessons learned
Interest from organizations such as Clinical Commissioning Groups has been high, but most have no structure or funding in place to host the education in a sustainable manner. Additionally, releasing staff from practice is often a problem. Therefore, some have requested a one-off training directly to a few health care staff or have not been able to take it up. Where Clinical Commissioning Groups have organized the training of trainers, they have struggled to support them to roll it out. The rolling out of training by trained trainers has been successful when it has been funded as a specific project (NHS Trust as part of a CQUIN), and by staff trained as trainers who have autonomy and can organize it themselves (health trainers employed by a city council).

Reflections
There is a need for provider organizations to have a system and funding in place to support the education of healthcare professionals.