The development of the mental health service user movement and research into mental health
Challenges and Opportunities

Juliet Foster, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge
Outline

• Situating the mental health service user movement
• A brief history of the mental health service user movement
• User-led and User-focused research
• Where does this leave academic research on mental health?
Traditions within mental health research

• Privileging of professional understanding
• Work on public understanding
• Until recently, very little on understandings held by people considered to have mental health problems

• Why?
  – Physical separation
  – Knowledge subjugated - ‘Lack of insight’
Changes

• Professional
  – Shift in health services towards consumerism and patient satisfaction

• Academic
  – Shift in social sciences to narrative approaches, social constructionism, etc.

• Community
  – Development of the mental health service user movement
The Development of the Mental Health Service User Movement

• Forerunners
  – Voices of patients in literature and art
  – John Perceval and The Alleged Lunatics’ Friends Society (1845)
  – Growth of user movement in other countries e.g. USA, Netherlands

• U.K.
  – 1970s COPE and Mental Patients’ Union
  – 1980s onwards
    • Diversity of origin e.g. MIND and Survivors Speak Out; Reclaim Bedlam and Mad Pride
    • Diversity in representation e.g. Rethink (formerly National Schizophrenia Fellowship)
    • Diversity of aims e.g. Depression Alliance and Manic Depression Fellowship
Research

• Funded by organisations e.g. People First Study 1993; Mental Health Foundation, 1997

• User-led or User-Focused research – findings and benefits
  – UFM team at the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health e.g. Rose, 2001
  – Service User Research Enterprise at Institute of Psychiatry e.g. Rose et al., 2003
The role of academic researchers

• Allies (Sayce, 2000)
• ‘Academics with attitude’ (Barnes and Bowl, 2001)
• ... Or not?

• Power relations
• The insider/outsider debate
Ways forward

• What can an academic researcher offer?
  – Different skills, training, perspectives, audience
    ‘knowing things and having skills is good. There is nothing wrong with expertise per se, nor is there anything wrong with seeking confirmation of our expertise. It is the way in which this expertise is used, and the places in which we look to confirm it, that can be problematic’ (Repper and Perkins, 2003 p.74)

• Participatory approaches to research
• Reflexivity
Some conclusions

• Political implications
• Practical implications
• Theoretical implications
  – Interaction between forms of knowledge
    • Social representations theory
    • Sociology of Scientific Knowledge