



Case study

Raj: access to spiritual support

1 Background

Raj is in his 30s and has spent much of his life in different prisons. He had been transferred to a mental health ward when he was referred to us.

Raj was dissatisfied with his care plan, which was based on psychological treatment and medication but didn't address his spiritual needs. Spirituality is very important to Raj. While he doesn't follow any particular religion, he believes there is something 'out there,' and that exploring this would help him gain a deeper understanding of his mental health.

Our advocate, Deniz, met him when she was visiting the ward to make patients aware of the advocacy service, and he asked for her support.

2 The process

Deniz and Raj discussed his care plan together. He told her how he was wary of speaking to the ward staff or his doctor about his concerns, in case they took his ideas about spirituality as a sign of mental health problems. This wariness was affecting his everyday relations with them in all matters.

Deniz suggested to Raj that he speak with Peter, who is the Spiritual Care Coordinator for his hospital trust. She knew him and felt his perspective on spirituality and his knowledge of practices such as meditation could be helpful. Raj said he'd like to talk to Peter, but was worried in case the hospital staff found out what they talked about. If they knew what was in his head, they'd think he was crazy, he said. Deniz assured Raj that all conversations with Peter would be confidential, and put them in touch.

3 Outcomes

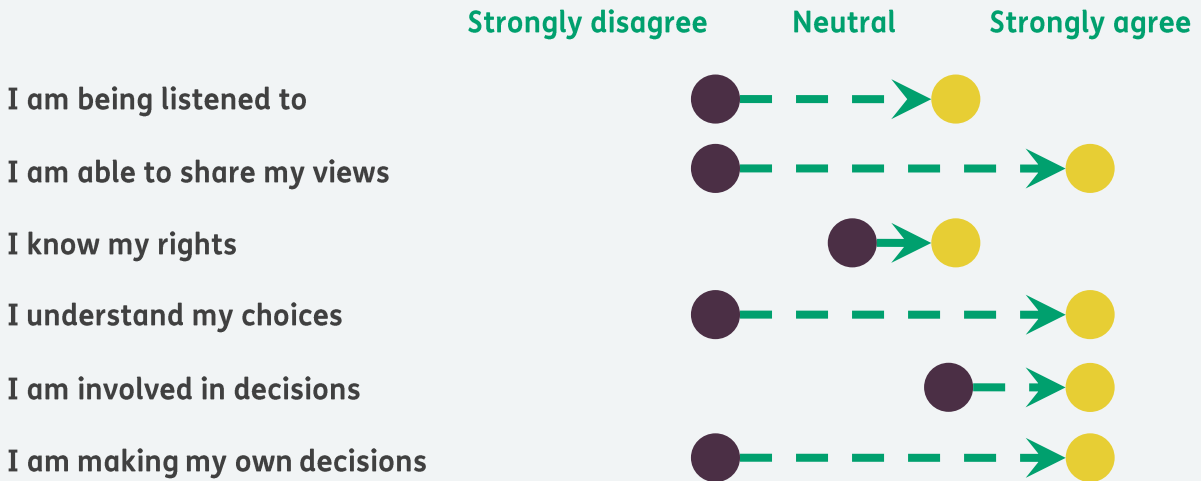
Raj has been talking to Peter regularly for the past nine months and has found it really useful. Their conversations help him make sense of the world and feel happier in himself, as well as giving him a better understanding of his feelings and thought processes.

He is more comfortable with his care plan now; the support from a professional who understands his beliefs makes it feel more consensual, rather than simply something he has to comply with. Having contact with Peter particularly helped Raj during the coronavirus lockdown when he was feeling very low.

Our advocate's assessment of Raj's outcomes

● at the beginning of the case

● at the end of the case



4 Systemic issues

This case brings up the important question of whether clinical staff see spiritual support as a potential need for all patients, regardless of whether they identify with a particular faith. Article 9 of the Human Rights Act covers freedom of thought, conscience and religion: is access to spiritual support for those with non-traditional beliefs available and encouraged?

A more complex question is whether non-ordinary states of consciousness might be experienced as a spiritual phenomenon rather than exclusively perceived as a symptom of mental illness. Navigating this territory requires a high level of skill on the part of mental health practitioners and those in the role of spiritual support.