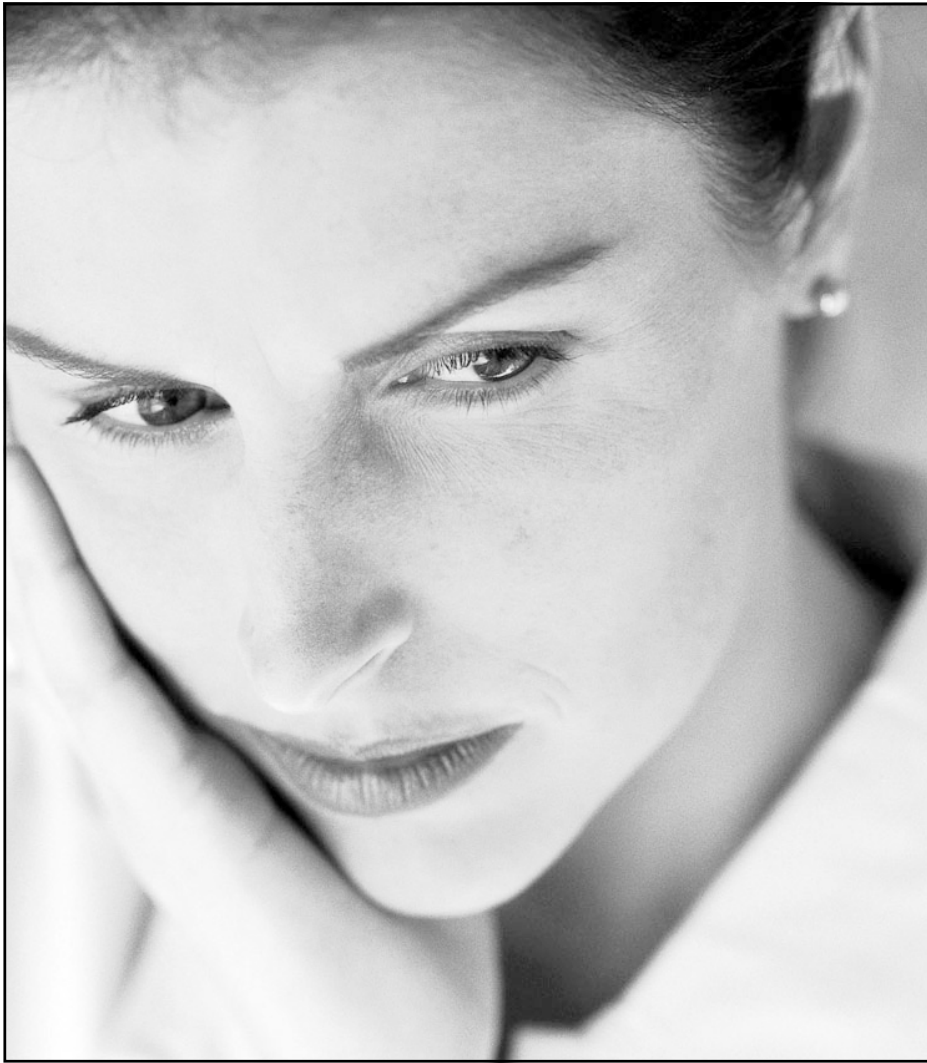


services for mental health sufferers

# illness



**SUPPORT:** It's crucial that people feeling unwell should get immediate access to the support they need.

"Then they don't do well and have to be re-admitted to hospital," says Mr Saunders.

"There are too few supports and family members are often the ones being left to provide care."

Aside from the sufferers themselves, mental health illnesses can have a huge effect on the lives of sufferers' relatives and loved ones and chairman of SI, Patrick Annesley, says families of patients need to be taken into consideration.

"GPs sometimes don't realise how difficult it is for people who are confronted with the knowledge that their relative might have a serious mental illness," says Mr Annesley.

"GPs and other health professionals need to take the needs of the family and its role into account."

The virtual absence of respite care for families looking after relatives with mental health illnesses does not help matters.

Indeed, patients can sometimes be discharged from hospital, particularly from city centre hospitals, before they should, due to a shortage of beds.

Mr Annesley says the solution lies in a more flexible approach to making beds available and admitting patients to hospitals, regardless of whether they live within the hospital's catchment area or not.

As it stands, patients can be dis-

charged early from hospital, although there are beds available in other city hospitals.

And the list continues.

Another criticism the report voices is an absence of specialist teams for the provision of services for the elderly and for adults with intellectual disabilities.

There is only one team specialising in care for the elderly in the HSE (Southern Area) when it is recommended there should be five, and there is only one specialist team for adults with intellectual disabilities instead of the recommended five or six.

Meanwhile, the total absence of rehabilitation services in the whole of the region also means, "people are back in hospital quicker than they should be."

Pat Seager says this absence of rehabilitative services often prevents people making a full recovery.

"People with schizophrenia often get ill at crucial life development stages, for example at stressful times like around the Leaving Cert," says Ms Seager.

"During the recovery stage they need support to enhance their skills and allow them to go back to college and so on," she says.

"This type of support is crucial in helping people avoid further epis-

odes or periods of being unwell."

The mental health needs of children and teenagers are also being neglected.

There is no designated inpatient unit in the region for children aged between six and 15.

"You have a situation where people as young as 15 are being admitted to adult units, which are totally inappropriate," says Ms Seager.

All-in-all, it would appear that existing services are failing the people they propose to serve.

Equally damaging, however, to both sufferers and their loved ones is the enduringly negative perception of mental illness. There's the incorrect belief out there that once you have a mental illness, you will always have a mental illness.

"As well as lobbying for better services, we are trying to promote the idea of recovery from mental health illnesses," says Pat Seager.

"People can experience a period of challenging mental health and then recover, just as someone with a physical illness, such as breaking a leg does.

"Having a mental health illness shouldn't carry the life sentence it does at the moment."

● **Tomorrow: A father's struggle to access mental health services for his daughter.**

## O'Shea on Monday



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### Wedding day goes well despite a very close shave

**ROBERT O'SHEA**  
*on what makes a perfect 'best man' at a wedding*

THE key to a good wedding is preparation. That's what I tried to drum into the others as we sat around the telly in the early hours of last Wednesday morning drinking beer. I have one sibling, my brother, and it was his big day.

When he had asked me to be best man I had agreed on three conditions.

One: There would be an exotic dancer invited to the stag night (there wasn't). Two: The bridesmaid would not have a boyfriend (she had). Three: I wouldn't have to read any poetry (I did).

Being a magnanimous sort of bloke, I had forgiven my brother these things. And being best man and somewhat responsible, I realised that it was getting late and we had a busy morning ahead of us, so I went out to the fridge, discovered there was no beer left and followed the others up to bed.

The next morning, following the traditional wedding day breakfast in my family of two headache tablets, we headed off for our shave.

We wanted to scrub up well for the big day. Whereas women, if they were allowed to, might spend several happy decades getting ready cosmetically for a big occasion like a wedding — using enough cotton-wool buds to insulate the attic of a semi-detached bungalow — us men are usually happy if we can simply manoeuvre a razor across our faces without lacerating our jaws. While some men now use lotions, creams and other dermatologically tested beauty products on their facial skin, most of us will be satisfied if, while there may be some traces of stubble, there is no shaving cream still visible when we are leaving the house (if it's behind the earlobe that's not visible and so it doesn't count).

To ensure this would be the case last Wednesday morning, five of us booked ourselves in for a hot towel shave. This was a new experience for me. My normal routine shave on a summer's day will be with cold water and could be considered a close shave on account of how close it is before I have to leave for work. These Turkish barbers were in a different business. By the time they unravelled the hot towels they had wound around my head I was dozing off slightly, almost oblivious to the fact that a stranger would soon be holding a blade to my neck.

It can be unsettling once he gets started but after a little while you wonder what you were worrying about right up until the point he lights a cu-tip and sticks it in your ear... What the HELL was that? "No worry sir, I was just singeing your ear hair." I don't have any ear hair. "No, not any more sir."

I kept my eyes open for the rest of the procedure, which involved a second shave and, at one stage, an inexplicable finger-tap dance on my forehead.

Suitably refreshed, we departed and strolled through the morning air with our raw chins. Realising that we had spent a little too long in the barbers though we were soon strolling a little quicker and reaching a light jog in places.

After collecting some flowers, we rushed home, showered, got dressed, and were soon heading back for the city.

It was once we got to the registry office that I came into my own. My most important job was to take care of the wedding music. The previous night I had burned a CD with the requested wedding songs, but unfortunately, they had all recorded in the wrong order. The other snag was that the plug socket in the registry office was at the back of the room and I, as best man, was required to be near the front. A man in a kilt came to my rescue and after a brief explanation of what to play and when — Pachelbel's *Canon* for the bride's entrance, Mozart's *Salut d'Amour* while I read the poem, the Jaws theme while I pretended I couldn't find the rings — he was only slightly more confused than when I had begun talking to him.

Amazingly, other than the father of the groom arriving fashionably late, the whole ceremony went off without a hitch. And everyone enjoyed themselves at the reception afterwards, but how much this had to do with the free bar between 2pm and 4pm, I'm not sure. Also, they laughed in the right places when I gave my speech a little later.

What all this leads me to believe is that I was a great best man. And it was all down to preparation. But some of us may not have the time necessary for this and that's why this week I have a readers' offer for all those who are best men this autumn. For the outstanding value price of €29.99 I will tailor-write a speech for your specifications, collate a compendium of classical hits on CD and throw in a kit-bag of goodies for all you'll need on the big day.\* So order yours now at the e-mail address above.

\*You'll have to light your own cu-tip.