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Using psychological first aid as an approach to enhancing the clinical competency of non-registered clinical staff

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Background: Responding to untoward incidents on acute inpatient wards quickly and efficiently is imperative. Non-registered frontline staff such as Healthcare Assistants (HCAs) should have the opportunity to undertake training to fulfill this need.

Aim: To explore the impact and effectiveness of training HCAs working on acute inpatient psychiatric wards in Psychological First Aid (PFA).

Method: Mixed methods pre/post feasibility study; gathering data through questionnaires with service users and HCAs and interviews with ward managers to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of PFA training for HCAs.

Results: Quantitative data indicates that post training, the HCAs and service users ranked the therapeutic milieu of the ward more favorably than at pre-training and that the self-efficacy of HCAs increased post training. The number of untoward incidents before and after the PFA training on the wards decreased post training. Qualitative data indicates that there was no difference between service user feedback pre and post training on either ward. The ward manager interviews post-training were positive and informative in nature; 4 themes were evident: Staff utilized new skills and enthusiasm, calmer atmosphere on the ward and staff togetherness, confidence and reflection of practice and therapeutic engagement. The reported confidence of HCAs in skills post training was high; the quality of the PFA activities was rated as moderate to high by all trainees. General feedback was very positive.

Conclusions: Training HCAs in PFA appears to be effective in improving staff confidence and therapeutic engagement with service users. Changes were also noted in ward culture and atmosphere. There are indications that PFA techniques are relevant and useful to HCAs caring for distressed and disturbed service users. It appears that PFA provides a framework and easily understood tool-kit that are harmonious with nursing values.

Biography

Mary is Professor of Mental Health Nursing and Director of the Centre for Public Engagement, Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education, Kingston University and St George's, University of London.

Throughout her career she has held a number of clinical, managerial and academic positions including coordinator of the Northern Ireland Centre for Health Informatics. She is involved in a number of research projects locally and internationally. She is a fellow of both the Royal Society of Medicine and the European Academy of Nurse Scientists, and an expert panel member of HORATIO, the European Association for Psychiatric Nurses, and a member of the Institute of Leadership and Management.

Mary has a well-established record of Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) in education and research dating back to the 1980s. Outcomes of her work with respect to PPI in both these areas have had impact nationally and internationally. Integral to this work has been the co-production and delivery of education programmes, as well as PPI at all stages of the research process. PPI is one of her key research interests.

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