Mind Essentials - Mental Illness Nursing Resource

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LAUNCH OF MIND ESSENTIALS

In November 2008 the Hunter Institute of Mental Health (HIMH) released MIND Essentials a new online resource for nurses and midwives working in hospital and community settings across the Hunter New England region. MIND Essentials provides nurses and midwives with practical information and strategies for supporting people in their care who present with behaviours related to a range of mental health issues. The resource is freely available online (via both the HIMH website and Nursing and Midwifery homepage on the Hunter New England Health Intranet), as well as in hard copies that are located within each ward and service across the Hunter Region.

The MIND Essentials project was born out of an identified need within the Hunter New England Area Health Service (HNEAHS). This was the need for a range of easily accessible and user friendly resources, that could have a positive impact on nurses’ and midwives’ confidence and competence in providing professional assessment and care to people presenting with mental illness.

Funded through the Hunter New England Health Nurse and Midwife Strategy Reserve Funding, the objectives of MIND Essentials are to:

1. increase nurses’ and midwives’ knowledge and understanding about common mental disorders, the symptoms associated with the disorders and their treatment;
2. promote positive attitudes towards nursing people with mental illness and hence possibly reduce the stress involved in providing nursing care; and
3. promote best nursing practice by communicating strategies that can be used by nurses for the management of behaviours that can be associated with mental disorders including mania, depression, delusions, hallucinations, refusing to eat, suicidal thinking and aggression.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

One in five Australians will experience a mental illness (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998). Persons with mental illness use general hospitals for a range of health care services, along with the rest of the community. Thus, nursing staff require an understanding of a patient’s psychiatric condition and treatment in order to support the management of the illness while in hospital, irrespective of the reason for the patient’s admission (Sharrock & Happell, 2006). This is not dissimilar to the support required to maintain a patient’s usual treatment for chronic illnesses such as asthma and diabetes. In addition, admission to hospital or experiencing a physical illness may act as a stressor resulting in the exacerbation of a person’s psychiatric symptoms (Sharrock & Happell, 2006). Therefore understanding of symptoms of mental illness and how to respond is essential for the delivery of good quality health care.

Psychiatric patients when they are unwell are also more likely to present or be taken initially to the Emergency Department of a General Hospital where nursing staff usually do not have specialist training in mental health (NSW Health, 1998). In primary care, there is a nation-wide trend towards employment of Practice nurses (Ansell, 2007) who may have limited training or experience in working with patients who are mentally ill, yet potentially these patients may require a large proportion of their workload. Nurses working in primary, community or hospital settings are likely to encounter frequent presentations of mental illness in their routine work.

Research on the attitudes of health care staff to patients with mental illness has identified that presentation of mental illness can be associated with responses of fear, anxiety and anger (Bailey, 1998; Brinn, 2000). Stigma associated with mental illness can also mean that consumers are treated differently once it is known that they have been diagnosed with mental illness (Kuey, 2008). However, a range of studies (Reed & Fitzgerald, 2005; Payne et al., 2002; Kolodziej & Johnson, 1996) has shown that levels of confidence and comfort in working with people with mental illness increase when health care workers are provided with information and when they experience positive contacts with consumers. This highlights the important role that practical information resources and opportunities for positive consumer contact can have in supporting nurses.

However, one of the problems facing nurse educators nation-wide is the difficulty experienced by employers in releasing nursing staff to attend face-to-face training (Cleary & Walter, 2006). Information available online is seen as one solution to this problem.

The design of MIND Essentials as a free online resource was seen as an appropriate response to providing clear, relevant and practical mental health information for nurses and midwives working within the Hunter New England Region.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF MIND ESSENTIALS

The MIND Essentials resource is particularly aimed at those nurses and midwives who have not had specialised training or wide experience in mental health. Benefits of using the resource may include: increased confidence and comfort in nursing people who have a psychiatric diagnosis; decreased work-related stress; and increased job satisfaction. For nursing and practice managers, the resources may provide a means of supporting staff who experience discomfort or express a lack of confidence in caring for people who have a psychiatric diagnosis. For persons with mental illness, the resource may potentially decrease the impact of stigma associated with having a psychiatric diagnosis.

The Hunter Institute of Mental Health encourages all nurses and midwives to use these resources as a way of improving knowledge and ensuring that the nursing care provided to our patients, including those with mental illness, is the best possible.

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MIND ESSENTIALS RESOURCE CONTENT

The MIND Essentials resource covers a range of mental health related information and is divided into the following four sections outlined in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section 1. Information on caring for a person experiencing a mental illness</th>
<th>Section 2. Information on caring for a person presenting with behaviours, features or symptoms that <em>may</em> be associated with the presence of a mental illness</th>
<th>Section 3. Assessment tools</th>
<th>Section 4. Consumer stories</th>
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| Topics include:  
  - Anxiety  
  - Delusions  
  - Dementia  
  - Depression  
  - Eating disorders  
  - Hallucinations  
  - Mania  
  - Mental illness within the perinatal period  
  - Personality disorders | Topics include:  
  - Aggressive or violent behaviour  
  - Intoxication  
  - Suicidal behaviour | Tools and information that can be used to help inform a person’s care and management plan include:  
  - Psychosocial assessment  
  - Drug and alcohol assessment  
  - Suicide risk assessment | Stories about general hospital experiences by people with a mental illness, who have attended the hospital for reasons other than their psychiatric illness |

**References**


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