

Building Our Rural Mental Health Workforce: A Role for Enrolled Nurse Participation.

Category: Building a Sustainable Health Workforce.

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Aim

- The creative use of Enrolled Nurses in a Community Mental Health setting to enhance the skill mix of the community mental health team in order to improve service delivery.
 - Address chronic staff shortages in rural mental health.
 - Flexible skill mix to provide high quality care to a greater number of people.
 - Allows other clinicians to attend activities more consistent with their skills.
 - Better experiences for consumers.
 - Strengthening career pathways for ENs.

Nature and Extent of the Problem

- The Goulburn Mental Health Team had endured high vacancy rates for over 15 years.
 - Poor retention rates due to staff dissatisfaction from high work loads, and performing tasks not consistent with their level of training leading to industrial action.
 - Staff expressed concern with the inadequate level of care provided to clients with enduring illness, as acute presentations took precedence.
 - Increased consumer dissatisfaction with the service.

Strategic importance

- The project aligns with building a sustainable health workforce by focusing on the redesign of clinical roles and considering the changing needs of consumers.
 - Greater job satisfaction and improved retention of skilled staff.
 - Enhanced career opportunities for Enrolled Nurses.
 - Improved outcomes for enduring clients.
 - Provision of care across the health continuum in line with the National Mental Health Plan.

Planning & Implementing solutions

- Gaining support for the initiative:
 - Redesign of positions to ENs that were originally held by RNs.
 - 60% of clients were identified as having care needs consistent with the skills able to be provided by an EN.
 - Adequate support and supervision for the EN.
 - Stimulating work environment with opportunities for career enhancement.

Outcomes & Evaluation

- 50% reduction in case loads per clinician.
- Greater opportunities for outreach to remote areas.
- High level of staff satisfaction with this model of providing care.
- Greater activity across the health continuum.
- Reduction in adverse outcomes for the enduring client group.

Sustaining Change

- Service has committed to the role by formally reclassifying two clinical positions to EN positions.
- Formal supervision for the ENs.
- Promoting a culture within the team of valuing ENs as key players in service delivery.
- Support for ENs to undertake further study.

Lessons Learned

- It is possible to effect change by looking outside the traditional workforce and by thinking creatively.
- Sustaining an effective rural mental health workforce requires innovative solutions to job design and recruitment.
- Imperative to strike a balance between providing new and stimulating opportunities for ENs whilst ensuring they don't become overwhelmed.

Future Scope

- Other teams within The Greater Southern Area Health Service have adapted this model to address their staff shortages.
- The addition of ENs to the skill mix of the team has promoted opportunities for other clinicians to pursue additional training and to further develop clinical initiatives.