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Mental Health Nursing Education

The CDNM is the peak organisation that represents the Deans, Leaders and Heads of Higher Education courses for Nursing and Midwifery throughout Australia and New Zealand. The Council is the voice of higher education for nurses and midwives, and provides leadership on health policy, education standards and research as applied to nurses and midwives.

Background

The Council of Deans supports the promotion of best practice in mental health nursing through appropriate education. This statement is made in the context of mental health care systems where registered nurses are often pressured to undertake practices that are not commensurate with their level of education but are rather dictated by the pressures of organisations and associated with increasing cost containment.

Summary

- Undergraduate nursing courses prepare nurses at an initial level

- Specialist knowledge and skills requires a deepening level of educational preparation

- The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) deems specialist knowledge and skills to be acquired at level 8 or above

- Accreditation is the benchmark for quality and consistency in educational programs

- Consumers, carers and clinicians should be actively involved in the design, delivery, implementation and evaluation of the curriculum

- Learning content and processes require interactive, evidence-based teaching and learning rigour

Position

The changing mental health landscape requires a mental health nursing workforce that reflects contemporary knowledge and skills and has the capabilities to function as part of interprofessional and multidisciplinary teams. The mental health nursing (MHN) workforce is best developed through rigorous educational programs. These programs should span primary, secondary and tertiary prevention, government and non-government services, collaborative working relationships with consumer and carers, and other health care disciplines, a transition

from illness to wellness care, an awareness of global mental health concerns and the unique needs of vulnerable populations.

To prepare nurses with appropriate skills and qualifications to practice in these environments, students need education in recovery principles, primary mental health;
interventions for mental health challenges, mind-body interplay, co-associated conditions, adaptation, recovery and rehabilitation options, brief interventions, trauma-informed care, specialised services for vulnerable populations, and nurse-led interventions. These capabilities are postgraduate specialist competencies. Whilst undergraduate baccalaureate programs prepare nurses at an initial level, they are not equipped to deliver this level of skill on graduation. Specialist knowledge needs to be gained through postgraduate study. Thereafter, these nurses ought to be ready to make a smooth and successful transition into research higher degree programs, focus on subspecialties of MHN and clinical career advancement to nurse practitioner.

At undergraduate level best practice learning would include knowledge: about person-focused care in all health settings including mental health; mental health challenges and resources; the bio-psycho-social model; the impact of stigma and communication skills. Graduates of nursing should have mental health literacy and understand the negative impact of stereotypical views. These nurses are generalists.

Courses and programs should be driven by contemporary educational principles including: student engagement, interaction, critical reflection on established/emerging theories and practices, (MHN) evidence-based teaching, authentic assessment, and clinical guidelines to facilitate rigorous workplace learning

In considering mental health nurse education, the following position is taken:

- The CDNM endorses the implementation of Mental Health Nurse Education Taskforce (MHNET) guidelines for undergraduate nurse education related to mental health nursing.

- The CDNM expects registered nurses seeking to practice in mental health settings to hold specialist postgraduate qualifications.

- The CDNM expects that academics teaching mental health nursing have qualifications and recent expertise in mental health nursing.

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