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A strong commitment to mental health nursing

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Abstract
The School of Nursing, Midwifery and Indigenous Health (SNMIH) at the University of Wollongong, places great emphasis on providing nursing students with fundamental education and knowledge in mental health nursing. There are two dedicated undergraduate mental health subjects delivered within the Bachelor of Nursing (BN) program. Both subjects are placed in adjacent sessions to provide a consolidated speciality experience for all BN students. The two subjects incorporate core values and principles to guide the teaching of mental health nursing, learning outcomes that reflect the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (ANMC) competencies and are based on recommendations from the Mental Health Nurse Education Taskforce’s (MHNET) framework for mental health content in comprehensive pre-registration nursing curricula.

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A strong commitment to mental health nursing

BY RENEE BRIGHTON, ANGELA BROWN, TERRY FROGGATT AND SUSAN LIERSCH

The School of Nursing, Midwifery and Indigenous Health (SNMIH) at the University of Wollongong, places great emphasis on providing nursing students with fundamental education and knowledge in mental health nursing. There are two dedicated undergraduate mental health subjects delivered within the Bachelor of Nursing (BN) program. Both subjects are placed in adjacent sessions to provide a consolidated speciality experience for all BN students. The two subjects incorporate core values and principles to guide the teaching of mental health nursing, learning outcomes that reflect the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (ANMC) competencies and are based on recommendations from the Mental Health Nurse Education Taskforce’s (MHNET) framework for mental health content in comprehensive pre-registration nursing curricula.

It is also a requirement that for each of these subjects (placed at a 200 and 300 level) students attend a 20-day clinical placement that is mental health nursing specific. These placements occur at mental health facilities that care for people across the context of care continuum, such as mental health community facilities, inpatient units, Psychiatric Emergency Care (PEC) units and facilities that treat those with comorbidities, such as drug and alcohol use disorders.

Mental health is importantly integrated across the curriculum in all three years of the BN program. Students completing the (300 level) transition-to-practice subject also have the opportunity to undertake an additional 20-day clinical placement in a mental health environment.

In 2011, the SNMIH introduced the Bachelor of Nursing Advanced (Mental Health/Education) at a 400 level to provide a more advanced level of education and preparation for students interested in pursuing a career in mental health nursing. This subject builds on the knowledge and skills gained in the undergraduate mental health subjects and prepares students for advanced practice in mental health nursing.

The SNMIH is committed to providing students with a comprehensive and integrated education in mental health nursing, with a focus on developing the skills and knowledge necessary to provide high-quality care to patients with mental health conditions.
The major in mental health nursing

BY LORNA MOXHAM

Government inquiries and reports dating back almost as far as comprehensive nursing education itself have identified mental health nursing content as inadequate. Recommendations have been made but without 'the teeth' to make sure initiatives introduced have become part of the fabric of nursing education in Australia. One recommendation from at least two inquiries, including the recent Mental Health Nurse Education and Training (MHNET) report, was the introduction of a major in mental health nursing to provide an opportunity for interested students to hopefully become committed to pursue a career in mental health nursing after graduation.

Over the past decade, 14 universities have introduced a major of mental health nursing. All but four received funding from Commonwealth or state governments to assist this process. The initiative was welcomed by the mental health nursing profession. Many viewed it as the next best thing to a direct entry mental health program.

CQU University was one of the universities funded to introduce a major in mental health nursing. We wanted to examine how other universities had also progressed.

Our study involved a survey of the 14 identified universities to gain information about the status, uptake structure and content of the major, and telephone interviews with key staff to identify barriers and enablers.

Nine universities introduced a major between 2001 and 2011. Two universities have since ceased this program and five others have abandoned or indefinitely delayed their plans. That half of the programs offered are gone is cause for concern, particularly since the completion rate was estimated at about 80%. While numbers were small in some universities they were very impressive in others, with one university taking approximately 100 students a year into the program. Unfortunately that program is currently closing.

Despite repeated concerns about mental health nursing in undergraduate curricula, its status largely depends on senior mental health nurse academics to do what it takes to stop them disappearing.

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