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Building clinical confidence and skills: a placement with a difference

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Abstract
Overview of a Global Challenges funded project.

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Building Clinical Confidence and Skills: A Placement With a Difference

The location and duration of clinical placements impact upon student learning and clinical confidence (Chuan & Barnett 2012). However, mental health clinical placements are scarce and typically situated within in-patient settings where consumers are acutely unwell.

A team at the University of Wollongong, led by Professor Moxham, developed a 5-day immersive program called Recovery Camp addressing the need for quality mental health clinical placements. Recovery Camp – the first of its kind in Australia – is strengths-focused and individualised, facilitating personal recovery.

The camp occurs each May near Richmond, NSW. People with lived experience of mental illness attend, with therapeutic recreation and social connectedness the focus. Consisting of mindfulness activities like Tai Chi, and challenges like rock climbing and alpine rescue, the week is rewarding. Future health professionals, like nursing and psychology students, also attend. The interdisciplinary mix reflects real-world, collaborative, holistic practice.

In 2014, nursing students who attended Recovery Camp (n = 20; \( M = 30.65 \) years, \( SD = 10.49 \); 17 females) were compared to students who undertook a ‘traditional’ mental health clinical placement (n = 19; \( M = 30.53 \) years; \( SD = 11.81 \); 17 females). The 7-item Social Distance Scale (SDS) (Bogardus 1925) was used to capture perceptions about people with mental illness.

A repeated measures ANOVA demonstrated that, for Nursing students who attended Recovery Camp, the difference in self-reported social distance from pre-camp (\( M = 13.75, SD = 3.54 \)), to post-camp (\( M = 11.05, SD = 3.83 \)), and at follow-up (\( M = 11.30, SD = 2.16 \)) was statistically significant, \( F(1, 19) = 9.18, p = .001. \)
Findings demonstrated Recovery Camp involvement significantly reduced stigma amongst nursing students. This effect was maintained at 3-month follow-up and was not evident for the comparison group. The value of active, immersive interaction with consumers who are living in the community is clear.

David Pritchard, a student who attended camp in 2013 who now works as a Mental Health Nurse, stated:

“I look back to the Recovery Camp and can utilise what I learnt into my practice in a way that improves my practice, makes me a better nurse and provides more individualised and holistic care.”

Sponsorship is currently being sought. For information, please contact Ellie Taylor elliejo@uow.edu.au

References


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Caption: University of Wollongong Nursing, Psychology and Dietetics students create lasting memories on a 5-day therapeutic recreation camp with people living with a mental illness.

All participants have given their written consent for photographs to be shared publicly.