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Exploring the General Practice Nurse's Role in Delivering Primary Mental Health Care

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Abstract

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Exploring the General Practice Nurse's Role in Delivering Primary Mental Health Care

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Introduction

- General practice nurses (GPNs) are well positioned within community settings to provide first line care.
- Early assessment and intervention by the right health professional can enhance recovery and promote wellbeing in persons with mental health conditions.
- Little is understood about the role of GPNs in providing primary mental health care.



Background

- 7.3 million Australians have a mental illness.
- Depression and anxiety are the most commonly presented mental health conditions in general practice.
- \$8 billion AUD, was spent on mental health related services in Australia in the 2013-14 financial year.
- Strong primary health care systems reduce healthcare costs, have lower hospitalisation rates and deliver better health outcomes.



Aim

To explore the role of general practice nurses in the delivery of primary mental health care.



Method

- Critical review of the literature.
- Data from the review were used to develop an interview guide.
- Individual semi-structured interviews and focus groups.
- Interview transcripts underwent an iterative process of analysis.



Results: Literature review

- 28.8% of GPNs provide mental health care either daily or weekly and; 71.2% never, or infrequently provide mental health care.
- 94% of GPNs asked patients about depression, however, only 17.6% felt able to respond appropriately.
- Nearly 50% of nurses in general practice report they could do more complex activities within their scope of practice.



Results: Literature Review

- GPNs have the skills to manage and deliver interventions in general practice that are acceptable and feasible to consumers, GPNs and GPs.
- GPNs can achieve greater consumer compliance than care delivered by GPs.
- Although regularly caring for individuals with mental illness, GPNs do not always have the skills and confidence to deliver mental health care.



Results: Exposure to mental health

- GPNS acknowledged that they saw people with mental health conditions “all the time” and had developed good relationships with these individuals.
“to be honest, the patients open up a lot more to the nurses than they do to doctors” (GPN5).
- GPNs “flag” mental health issues to the GP. However, they admit this was not done well.
“a quick conversation in the corridor or a quick note in the case notes. Yeh, it’s not done that well” (GPN2).



Results: Desire for education

- Most GPNs recognised their own limitations in providing mental health care and expressed a desire for mental health education.

“I’m just a screening tool really. I guess I can do a little bit of motivational interviewing but really that’s the end of my skills really. My knowledge of medications is probably not that great, and certainly my knowledge of referral pathways is not that great” (GPN2)



Interviews: GPN roles

- One GPN provided the following insight to expand the GPNs role in primary mental health care.

“The GPN is sitting there. Give them the skills and they will be able to do heaps more in mental health. They’re seeing them all the time” (GPN6).



Discussion

- GPNs provide care for individuals with mental health conditions daily.
- GPNs want education and support focussed on mental health.
- Issues around funding and training must be addressed so that GPNs work safely and to the full extent of their practice.



Mental Health Practice Standards FOR NURSES IN AUSTRALIAN GENERAL PRACTICE



Conclusion

Defining the ways in which general practice nurses can contribute to mental health care will facilitate the development of their role. Clarifying their scope of practice and empowering these nurses to seek education and training to extend their mental health activities has the potential to improve the quality of mental health care in the community and improve health outcomes for those with mental health issues.



SURVEY PARTICIPATION

- We are collecting further survey data around GPNs and mental health.
- Please feel free to take a hard copy of the survey from the back of the room (or at the ACMHN booth).
- Your participation in this is greatly appreciated.

Thank you



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