2013

Family and carer mental health program: reflections on gaps in educational needs (poster)

Megan Green
Family and Carer Mental Health Program

Kerry Dawes
University of Wollongong, kerryd@uow.edu.au

Nagesh B. Pai
University of Wollongong, nagesh@uow.edu.au

Publication Details
Family and carer mental health program: reflections on gaps in educational needs (poster)

**Abstract**
Abstract of poster presentation presented at the ACHMN's 39th International Mental Health Nursing Conference Collaboration and Partnership in Mental Health Nursing, 22-24 October 2013, Pan Pacific Hotel, Perth, Western Australia.

**Keywords**
gaps, educational, reflections, needs, program, health, family, carer, mental

**Disciplines**
Medicine and Health Sciences | Social and Behavioral Sciences

**Publication Details**

This journal article is available at Research Online: [http://ro.uow.edu.au/smhpapers/1206](http://ro.uow.edu.au/smhpapers/1206)
Family and Carer Mental Health Program: Reflections on gaps in educational needs

Megan Green1, Kerry Dawes2 & Nagesh Pai2
1Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District
2Graduate School of Medicine, University of Wollongong, New South Wales

Background
Caring for someone with a Serious Mental Illness can result in considerable consequences for the caregiver. Working as a Family & Carer Consultant (CNC) within the Family and Carer Mental Health Program (an innovative partnership between NSW Health and a mandated NGO partner), recurrent themes regarding gaps in carers’ educational needs that that were unmet by existing programs were identified.

The ‘Understanding Schizophrenia’ education and skills program was developed and delivered to carers over 6 weeks.

The program content was carefully constructed to address the identified gaps. However as a new course, challenges to the structure and format of the course emerged as the course progressed. The following are some of those identified.

Challenges & Responses
The carers made a significant contribution to the content of the program by providing valuable examples of managing in the real world, the personal impacts of caring, recognising their limitations and the priority of caring for themselves. This generated program challenges including:

- Providing time and opportunity for each participant to share their own story and experiences.
- Time constraints that necessitated finding a balance between delivering course content and facilitating discussion.
- Emotional responses evoked in participants necessitated the provision of time, opportunity and a safe environment to address these.
- Differences in participants’ knowledge of mental health and duration of caring experience necessitated flexibility in delivering the session content to ensure the needs of all participants were met.

Other Outcomes
- The teaching and learning that occurred between the participants during the sharing was significant.
- Validation of carers as ‘experts’.
- It also became an opportunity to link some people in with appropriate help and support.

Conclusion
Through working in partnership with family and carers common gaps in their skills and knowledge were identified and the need for a specific program that met these needs became apparent. In addition, the knowledge gained through delivering these sessions will inform our future carer specific education initiatives.

Future directions
- Provision of an advanced course.
- Developing a format for delivery in rural and remote regions.
- Developing similar programs for other disorders.

Contact Details:
Megan Green – Phone (02) 4220 7921
meganlouise.green@sesiahs.health.nsw.gov.au
Family and Carer Mental Health Program: Reflections on gaps in educational needs

Megan Green, Kerry Dawes, Nagesh Pai

Caring for someone with a Serious Mental Illness can result in considerable consequences for the caregiver. Working as a mental health nurse in the Family and Carer Mental Health Program, an innovative partnership between NSW Health and a mandated NGO partner, I have identified recurrent themes regarding gaps in their educational needs that have not been met by existing programs.

This is an experiential narrative of the 'Understanding Schizophrenia' education and skills program that was developed and delivered over 6 weeks.

Differences in the level of knowledge and experience of the participants and previously unidentified gaps required flexibility in delivering the sessions. The time constraints necessitated finding a balance between delivering course content and facilitating discussion. In allocating session time I underestimated the value of giving each participant adequate time to share their own story and experiences and to deal with the emotional responses that this evoked. Whilst it was not a support group, the teaching and learning that occurred between the participants during this sharing was significant. They provided valuable examples of managing in the real world, the personal impacts of caring, recognising their limitations and the priority of caring for themselves. It also became an opportunity to link some people in with appropriate support and help.

It is through working in partnership with family and carers to identify common gaps in their skills and knowledge that the need for such a program became apparent. Future directions will include providing an advanced course, developing a format for delivery in rural and remote regions and developing similar sessions for other disorders.