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Active engagement of consumers in a healthy lifestyle program: outcomes of a multidisciplinary pilot project in a mental health rehabilitation unit

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ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT OF CONSUMERS IN A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE PROGRAM: OUTCOMES OF A MULTIDISCIPLINARY PILOT PROJECT IN A MENTAL HEALTH REHABILITATION UNIT

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The National Mental Health Commission identifies the physical health of those living with a mental illness as worse than the general community on just about every measure. This paper presents the results of a pilot healthy lifestyle program aimed at engaging consumers with targeted and individualised health activities within a recovery-orientated rehabilitation unit.

The ACTive program ran for 18 weeks in 2013, delivered by a team of mental health staff, dietitian, exercise physiologist, academic, and nursing and allied health students. Approval to evaluate the program was received through the Joint UOW/ISLHD Health and Medical HREC. Evaluation targeted quantitative physical health measures for consumers, and qualitative measures for consumers, staff and students. Preliminary results show a grouped average weight loss of 1.1kg, which has clinical significance given the weight-gain challenges associated with serious mental illness. Statistical comparison with a control group is currently underway. Consumers also improved in functional exercise capacity, with 80-metre average increase for the 6-Minute Walk Test, and 2.6 repetition increase in the Sit-to-Stand test for functional leg strength. Feedback provided has identified a number of key challenges to the sustainability and management of this type of program within current mental health service provision environments.

Targeted and individualised health programs integrated into mental health services have great potential to reduce the existing disparity in physical health. However, the capacity for collaborative involvement of multidisciplinary health professionals is critical. Furthermore, programs that foster allied health student placement may enhance vocational scope for allied health within mental health services.