Special Issue of Contemporary Nurse: Advances in Contemporary Mental Health Nursing

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I found this special issue of Contemporary Nurse focusing on mental health nursing interesting for a number of reasons, the foremost being the very fact of its focus on mental health nursing. It also represented the views and work of some of the leaders in the profession across a range of scholarly and research articles. I found myself debating and discussing (in my head) many of the issues as they were presented.

I am interested in consumer participation in mental health services. In the future, the changes brought about by consumer participation will have a greater impact than the changes that were the result of deinstitutionalization. Views on the changing roles of consumers are only beginning to take hold in Australia. This special issue strengthens my belief that consumers are nurses' natural partners in mental health care and that in the future we can look forwards to working side by side. Naturally I was pleased to see that a number of consumers were included as co-authors on papers.

This special issue is based around the guest editorials from Kenneth Walsh, Stephen Elsom and Dianne Wynaden. It is divided into three sections: consumers and mental health, mental health nursing practice and mental health nursing education. The guest editorials are followed by scholarly and research articles. Below I have attempted to capture the essence of the wide range of topics addressed.

In the editorial, consumers and mental health, Kenneth Walsh asks us to remember that we (nurses) have a lot in common with consumers and that we should be considering the people we work for or with holistically. Unfortunately, there is pressure on the 'bottom line' to be reductionist and efficient and this is not always consistent with holism. The research presented in this section suggests that consumers still feel excluded from decision-making processes, and often when they are included the 'consumer participation' is tokenistic. Although in another study consumers were found to have a

positive attitude to mental health nurses and value their role in emergency departments. This is an interesting and emerging area of research, that of consumer evaluation of service delivery.

Issues we need to address in our practice include racism towards minority groups especially Indigenous Australians. One of the consequences of racism is that we know little about the mental health of minority groups and often treat them with one size fits all approach. This section also encourages us to remember that consumers are people; the final article's findings indicate that exercise can make a very real difference to people with dementia.

In the second section, mental health nursing practice, Stephen Elsom acknowledges the broad and changing role of mental health nurses. There is an interesting article on the challenges mental health nurses face when working with people diagnosed with a borderline personality disorder. An emphasis is placed on the relationship nurses have with consumers. Respect for consumer's rights is 'embarrassingly simple', unfortunately we are often unnecessarily coercive in practice with people admitted involuntarily.

Mental health nurses suffer more violence as a result of their work than other nurses. Not only from patients but also from coworkers, the violence includes physical and verbal attacks as well as sexual harassment. This violence is accepted as part of the job.

Mental health nurses also work with new mothers and there is an interesting review of the literature on medications and breast feeding. There is also an article which encourages us to be more aware of post-partum depression. Apparently only about half of women in the United States who suffer post-partum depression are detected despite the availability of effective screening tools.

At the other end of the life scale, people with dementia are increasingly being admitted to acute care services. The research on this topic suggests that life would be better for this group of consumers if we were people focused and consider the individual needs of the person with dementia in the acute setting.

Mental health nursing education is the subject of the final section and guest editorial. The significant changes to mental health care in general and nursing in particular are discussed. Dianne Wynaden, the author of the editorial (an academic), clearly values the opportunity to work with a clinician. Future education needs to value a partnership between clinicians, consumers and educators. The article on education in a clinical setting also recognizes the critical role clinicians and clinical settings have in developing/educating the next generation of mental health nurses.

Borderline personality disorders come under the spot light again with research that examines training staff in the use of dialectic therapy in treating people diagnosed with a borderline personality disorder.

This section then moves us to the workplace and mental health with an interesting article that draws attention to the emphasis on physical health and the lack of interest in mental health in the discussions around primary health care in the work place. The next article challenges us to broaden our practice to include not only care of the people with mental illness but also primary mental health care.

The issue finishes with two book reviews: one on mental health care for people with learning disabilities and one on the social consequences of closing the asylums.

This special issue is a valuable resource not only because it acknowledges the contribution mental health nurses make, but also because it represents some of the developments in the specialty. It encourages us to critically review our practice in the light of these developments.

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