

## **Research Project**

### **Name of Project**

Undergraduate Nursing Students' experience of the psychiatric/mental health nursing placement

### **Research Team**

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### **Funding Body**

Centre for Psychiatric Nursing Research and Practice

### **Project Summary**

This study was developed by members of the Liaison Committee of the Centre for Psychiatric Nursing Research and Practice (Mr Stephen Baker, Mr Peter Colliccoat, Mr Stephen Elsom, Ms Val Goodwin, Ms Teresa Kudinoff, Mr Greg Miller, Ms Amanda Mzoiac, Ms Karen Nightingale, Ms Jackie Warner, Mr David Watkins, Mr Frank Zeinstra and Assoc. Prof Brenda Happell). The aim of this study is to investigate undergraduate nursing students' experience of their clinical placement in the psychiatric/mental health setting. The four specific areas to be examined include: (1) preparation for, and (2) satisfaction with their clinical experience; (3) attitudes towards people experiencing a mental illness; and (4) attitudes towards psychiatric nursing as a potential career option. A large scale survey will be conducted with the total population of undergraduate students on psychiatric nursing placements for a three year period 2003 - 2005. A survey will be administered to students at the commencement of their placement, and will be repeated at the end of placement. The post-placement survey will include all information from the pre-placement survey as well as some additional questions to measure satisfaction with the placement. The results of this study will provide valuable information on the factors that influence nursing students' attitudes towards their clinical experience in psychiatric/mental health nursing.

### **Progress**

Completed

### **Summary of Findings**

Approximately eight hundred nursing students participated in the first round of the study (pre-placement); approximately seven hundred participated in the second round (post-placement). Based on responses to the pre-placement survey, results indicated that nursing students undertaking their studies at universities with more extensive mental health course content typically felt better prepared for their clinical placements. In turn, students who felt better prepared for their mental health placement generally felt less anxious about working with consumers of mental health services and were more likely to want to pursue a career in the area. A similar pattern of findings was revealed through an analysis of post-placement information.

Responses to the post-placement survey indicated that positive clinical experiences were also significantly related to a desire to pursue a career in psychiatric / mental health nursing. Specifically, students were more likely to want to pursue a career in this specialty area and/or apply for a graduate nurse program in the field if they felt staff had been welcoming of students and were responsive to their needs. Other factors associated with clinical placements, such as more time with preceptors and a greater number of clinical hours, were also associated with improved attitudes towards consumers and increased preparedness for the field.

The findings from this study suggest the need to strengthen the psychiatric / mental health course content of undergraduate nursing programs to increase student preparedness, thereby improving the recruitment of new nurses to the mental health field. The findings also highlight the importance of clinical placement experiences. The attitudes and behaviours of the existing labour force towards students undertaking placements – as well as the provisions services make to support students – have the potential to increase or decrease students' desire to enter this specialty area. Either way, the future is in our hands.

### **Publications**

Hayman-White, K., & Happell, B. (in press). Nursing students' attitudes toward mental health nursing and consumers: Psychometric properties of a self-report scale. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*.