An Analysis of the Education and Training Needs of Psychiatric Nurses in a HSE (Western area) Mental Health Service

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INTRODUCTION

Psychiatry in Ireland had undergone a recent and rapid development in treatment and care of people living with a medical diagnosis of mental illness. This move has been from a traditional institutionally based treatment towards a more community/social based model of care. Similarly, nursing practice which was once considered to be more of a vocation has also reformed with the move towards graduate identity and acceptance as a profession. While mindful of these developments this study explored the self perceived training and education needs of a group of psychiatric nurses in a region of the HSE West.

METHODOLOGY

Given these paradigm shifts the key research question in this study was what are the present training and education needs for psychiatric nurses? This study employed a mixed methodology where both a quantitative, self administered questionnaire (n=261) was used followed by qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews (n=11).

RESULTS

This study presents the key findings in relation to participants’ responses about their experiences including: the development of the nursing profession; the level and type of qualifications needed by nurses; the balance between skills training and theory education on professional nursing programmes; the methods of delivering training and education; barriers to education and training; supports in the context of a learning organisation; practical supports including, funding, time off, geographical location of education programmes. Significantly this study explored psychiatric nurses’ personal narratives on the barriers and supports, both intrinsic and extrinsic, in returning to or continuing with adult education within their profession.

CONCLUSION

Clinical care contexts and educational institutes must work together to develop and establish appropriate, specialist and regionally based accredited and validated courses which allow for development of peoples’ sense of self. The role, possibility and liberating power of education must surely be one that can reach out to and connect with people across the barriers of age, gender, geography and profession. In a way that builds on peoples’ experiences,
connects with their hearts and develops their minds so that the real extrinsic impediments in peoples’ lives, such as child and family commitments, financial implications, location of courses and demands of work are managed, while the deeper, more threatening intrinsic impediment, the voice of self doubt that echoes within the hearts and minds of each one of us is challenged and silenced.