Mental health nurses

Mental health is about how we think, feel and behave. One in four people in the UK have a mental health problem at some point in their lives, which affects their daily life, relationships or physical health. Mental health problems can affect anyone.

Mental health nurses provide care to people of all ages, including, children, young people, adults and older people who experience, or may be at risk of developing, mental health problems.

In common with nurses working in other fields of practice, mental health nurses provide care and treatment to meet people's physical, psychological, social, mental and spiritual care needs.

This includes providing support and interventions to families, carers and friends who play a significant role in people's lives in a way that supports their recovery.

This field is distinctive because its core is about the professional relationships nurses form with the people they work with. It is also about mental health nurses' ability to use their own thoughts and experiences - their 'self' - when working with people.

Mental health work

Mental health nurses work with people in various places, including community teams, day services and hospitals, as well as people's homes or workplaces.

They use a range of relationship building and communication skills to work alongside people to support them in their recovery. This includes an ability to offer specific interventions, such as psychological therapies, family therapies, and other relationship and communication-based group and individual interventions.

Recovery

In recent years, the concept of 'recovery' has been widely accepted in the UK as a means to modernise and change the way mental health services are provided and

delivered.

This has changed way we think about the role of mental health nurses. Recovery focused approaches mean that mental health nurses must be able to work alongside people in a way that supports them to live meaningful and satisfying lives, as defined by them, in presence or absence of symptoms.

The experience of mental health problems and recovery is a deeply personal process that is unique to the person. For mental health nurses this means they need to work in a way that shifts the emphasis from being seen as 'experts' towards working in a way that recognises and maximises the person's own expertise and strengths.

Recovery means new ways of working, including new skills and values that enable people's self-direction and social inclusion, and focus on providing person-centred care, with a shared responsibility for positive risk taking.

Understanding situations

Mental health nurses also need to acknowledge and address the potential imbalance of power between professionals and people experiencing mental health problems, such as situations when a person has to be compulsorily detained or treated.

At these times, the mental health nurse must help people exercise their rights and uphold safeguards to ensure minimal restriction on people's lives, whilst also maintaining the safety of others.

Health promoting activities

Mental health nurses also play a key role in promoting the mental and physical health and wellbeing of individuals, communities and populations by challenging the inequalities and discrimination that contribute to mental health problems. They must use health promoting activities that help prevent problems in at risk groups.

Mental health polices in all UK countries are driving the change in the way services are organised and delivered.

There is a shift from hospital based inpatient care towards alternative, community based models that integrate and maximise the role of health, social care, voluntary sector, service users and carer led organisations.

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