

The provision of mental health nursing care to Indigenous Australians: How do we rate?

Introduction

Indigenous Australians represent 3.3% of the total population and 29% report a diagnosed mental health condition (ABS, 2016). While each person's experience of mental illness is different it must be viewed within their lived experience. The effects of colonisation including racism continue to impact negatively on Indigenous people who find health services unwelcoming and alien. When hospitalised in the acute mental health environment, the care they receive can impact greatly on their long term health outcomes.

Aims

The aim of this presentation is to identify barriers and facilitators for mental health nurses when they provide mental health care to Indigenous Australians.

Method

Data from two qualitative and two quantitative studies conducted between 2014 and 2018 in the forensic mental health setting in Western Australia and data from the Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing (2016) on the use of restrictive practices will also be included. In addition, current literature in the area is explored.

Results

High rates of restrictive practices, including the use of PRN medications continue to be used in forensic mental health settings which also have high patient numbers of Indigenous Australians. The importance of nurses possessing emotional intelligence is a facilitating factor to the patient's wellbeing along with a sound understanding how offending behaviours manifest in people during an acute phase of their illness. A lack of education, knowledge and understanding of Indigenous culture and where Indigenous trauma comes from are identified as barriers to care. "White cultural privilege" where the norms and values of the "Western" way of life are the standard by which others are often judged also impacts on care delivery.

Discussion

Mental health nurses struggle to provide culturally safe care to Indigenous Australians and as a result adopt a race neutral stance. More Indigenous health workers need to be embedded in services and supported within this environment. Indigenous healing methods and engaging families and communities in services can also improve care delivery to our Indigenous population.

ABS (2016). National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2014-2015. Canberra: ABS.

AIHW 2018 Restrictive practices, Canberra: AIHW <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/c52725d1-0a78-49a2-a182-35e03ddbc20f/Restrictive-Practices-2017-18.pdf.aspx>