

If You Don't Know Where you are Going, you Might Wind up Someplace Else: Advancing Assessment in Dual Diagnosis Nursing

Presenter: Chris Taua

Intended audience: Presentation will be relevant to all health professionals, healthcare workers, carers and people with disability but will be of particular interest to nurses working in the area of dual diagnosis.

Session Description

Adequate epidemiological data regarding the mental health of people with intellectual disability (ID) is yet to be gathered and clinical experience shows that the full range of psychiatric disorders may be seen amongst this group with an estimated prevalence of 3-4 times more likely to experience emotional, behavioral, or psychiatric disorders.

A major impediment to effective treatment is the difficulty in recognising the mental health issues. Assessment and diagnosis of behavioural and emotional disturbance is particularly difficult due to intellectual, adaptive, and verbal impairments that limit reliability and reporting, and the presence of environmental factors that may exacerbate specific forms of behavior. Possibly the greatest obstacle however, is that instruments used to assess mental illness in the general community are not suitable for use with individuals with ID. As a consequence individuals may not receive effective assessment, treatment or support.

Whilst knowledge and understanding has expanded dramatically within the last decades a gap around effective nursing assessment skills for this group remains. Adequate assessment tools must be biopsychosocial in breadth and contextual and functional in depth. The treatment approach should reflect the assessment plan. It must involve the family and must never lose its consumer focus.

This presentation will introduce a proposed research study using a critical incident technique to focus on examining the interactions between and needs of individuals with ID, their family and nursing staff. A critical incident can be described as one that makes a significant contribution – either positively or negatively - to an activity or phenomenon.