

# **From understanding the problem to developing a solution: the introduction of a specialist Physical Health Nurse Consultant role.**



Brenda Happell

FIRST



*UNDERSTAND*

THE

**PROBLEM**

# Developing evidence-base

- Views of nurses (mixed methods)
- Consumer perspectives
- Carer perspectives
- Pilot study – specialist nursing position

# Nurses

- Focus groups with nurses employed in mental health settings (n=38)
- Interview guide sought nurses' views about physical health issues, how well they were addressed and potential barriers

# Findings

Acknowledge importance

Acknowledge not well addressed, due to:

- Lack of time
- Lack of skill
- Lack of knowledge
- Not my job, focus on core business (mental health)

**Specialist physical health nurse position considered a potential strategy to address barriers**

# Survey of Nurses in Mental Health

## National survey of members of Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (n=643):

- Confirmed main focus group findings
- Support for specialist nursing position (with reservations)

# Consumer perspectives

- Under-represented in the literature
- Frequent assumption consumers don't care about physical health
- Survey conducted by ACT Mental Health Consumer Network found physical health ranked at number 3 of major concerns

# Consumer perspectives project

- Focus groups x 4 (n=31)
- One nurse, one consumer facilitator
- Approximately 7.5 hours total recording
- Range 80 – 160 minutes
- Thematic data analysis led by consumer researcher



# Findings

**Participants described frequent neglect of physical health, themes included:**

- Diagnostic overshadowing
- Ignored
- Talking at, not with
- Financial limitations

**Specialist nursing role considered a potential solution (with some caution)**

## Consumer research: PHNC role

*... we need more nurses ... out in the community, on the ground where people are struggling to live independently in their homes or trying to get those links ... to the healthy activities ... the psychosocial stuff that with diet, nutrition, sleep ... I think it's great the more the mental health nurses get into that, but it's really a community psychosocial model rather than a clinical model*

# Carer perspectives

Role of carers in supporting people with mental illness has been identified  
Limited research into carers views about physical health issues suggests:

- limited access to GPs and primary health
- Health professionals discounting physical health problems

# Carer perspectives project

- Qualitative exploratory study
- Support and assistance from Carers ACT
- Two focus groups and one individual interview
- 13 participants
- Interviews conducted by nurse and carer interviewer

# Findings

- Two main themes:
  - Lack of service access and responsiveness
  - Shortage of care coordination
- Physical Health Nurse Consultant role viewed very positively, particularly for improved coordination:
- *... the whole process [providing physical health care] is ... hugely complicated and it needs to be long term, it needs to be ongoing and you can't have it stop and start and there needs to be a continuation of service*

# Trial of specialist nursing position

Six month pilot study

Specialist nursing position and treatment as usual compared to treatment as usual alone

## Findings:

- Increase in consumers meeting physical activity guidelines
- Modest increase in fruit and vegetable intake
- Reduction in smoking
- **Insufficient numbers for statistical significance, however demonstrated potential for the role**
- Lessons learned from the implementation process to underpin larger study



# Discussion and conclusions

Support for specialist role evident from nurses, consumers and carers

Role may contribute to:

- Improved coordination of care
- Integrated physical and mental health care
- Improved physical health care (most important)

Need for further research to explore potential of the role

National Health and Medical Research Council Grant:

- **Improving the cardiometabolic health of people with psychosis: The Physical Health Nurse Consultant service**

A combination of factors including a solid research background for intervention and persistence +++++



# Research (Dream) Team

Me, MHN academic

Dr Jackie Curtis – Psychiatrist, leader of the Healthy Active Lives Declaration

Dr Michelle Banfield – Consumer researcher

Mr John Goss – Health Economist

Dr Theo Niyonsenga – Statistician

Dr Rob Stanton – Exercise Physiologist, Researcher

Mr Andrew Watkins – MHN clinician and researcher

Dr Chris Platania-Phung – Mental Health Researcher (Psychology)

Dr Brett Scholz – Mental Health Researcher

Dr Lynelle Moon – Epidemiologist

Dr Phil Batterham – Statistician





# Brief Overview

24 month Randomised Controlled Trial comparing treatment as usual to treatment as usual plus PHNC

## Outcome measures:

**Burden of Disease risk factors:** BMI, total cholesterol, fasting glucose, blood pressure, smoking, fruit intake, vegetable intake, alcohol intake, physical activity;

**Consumer experience of care:** experience, acceptability, shared decision making, quality of life;

**Cost-effectiveness of physical health service delivery.**



# Progress

## Staff:

- Physical Health Nurse Consultant – Rasa Kabalia (credentialed MHN, NP Candidate)
- Clinical Research Assistant – Mary Morkel (RN with MH experience)

## Participant recruitment:

- Oh so slow, getting there
- Lots and lots of barriers .....



# Barriers

- Difficulties in engaging psychiatrists and clinical managers
- Nurses require additional certification for phlebotomy
- No pathology services co-located with Community Mental Health (clients need to make separate visit for bloods)
- Transport, parking

# Conclusions

Despite barriers, exciting opportunity to implement an evidence-based strategy to improve physical health care for consumers of MH services

Nurse-led initiative

Comprehensive evaluation

Recording and acknowledging barriers – important learning experience

**There is much left to do**

# Publications

Happell, B., Curtis, J., Banfield, M., Goss, J., Niyonsenga, T., Watkins, A., Platania-Phung, C., Moon, L., Batterham, P., Scholz, B., Prescott, V., & Stanton, R. (2018). Improving the cardiometabolic health of people with psychosis: A protocol for a randomised controlled trial of the Physical Health Nurse Consultant service. [Article]. *Contemporary Clinical Trials*, 73, 75-80.

Happell, B., Platania - Phung, C., Watkins, A., scholz, B., Curtis, J., Goss, J., Niyonsenga, T., & Stanton, R. (in press). Developing an evidence-based specialist nursing role to improve the physical health care of people with mental illness. *Issues in mental health nursing*,, *accepted for publication February 2019*.



**THANK YOU!**

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