Drug & alcohol nursing

by Warren Harlow, Brenda Happell and Graeme Browne

It would hardly surprise nurses to hear that opioid use is a significant problem in Australia. Yet how many would have a precise idea of the extent of the problem or the availability of services to meet the associated health needs?

In 2010, 46,078 Australians were registered in Opioid Replacement Therapy (ORT). Its popularity reflects demonstrated benefits in: reducing illicit drug use; the occurrence and severity of physical and mental illness; and criminal activity, common consequences of drug seeking behaviour. The attractiveness of ORT has resulted in a wait for treatment. Despite demand exceeding availability there is no national triage system for ORT. Therefore it is unknown whether people with the most pressing need for treatment (those at risk of harm and with minimal protective factors) are receiving it in a timely manner. With reports of a further 41,000 people in need of opioid treatment intervention, research is required to identify the real extent of the problem and to implement a system which processes people...
Coordination of Care

BY CHERYL GREEN AND GREG ROBERTSON

There is increasing recognition of the challenges for services and clinicians to adequately assess and respond to consumers presenting with co-occurring mental health and alcohol and other drug (AOD) issues.

Both the National Mental Health Plan (2009) and the National Drug Strategy (2007) identify improving consumer outcomes by calling for coordination of services to build better systems of care.

Progress in this area has been limited for a range of factors including a lack of integrated policy direction and resource allocation across sectors. Clinicians in primary care and specialist areas of mental health and drug and alcohol services have reported a lack of training and confidence to effectively assess and care for those with co-occurring mental illness and substance misuse issues (National Drug Strategy 2007, p109).

Experienced mental health nurse Gregory Robertson who has a special interest in drug and alcohol issues, is working as Clinical Practice Consultant at Adair Clinic, Noarlunga, South Australia. Motivated by his frustration with the lack of coordination between agencies, and the restriction to access for consumers with comorbidity, Greg enrolled in the Graduate Diploma in Addiction Studies and Mental Health through University of Adelaide. This joint venture between the School of Nursing and Discipline of Pharmacology combines specialist input between addiction and clinical responses designed to support professionals to work effectively in these key areas.

Equipped with a broader knowledge and skill base, Greg is now working with Sector Manager, Outer South Adelaide Metro Mental Health John Strachan, to implement the new (AOD) Mental Health Clinic in the outer south region of Adelaide. The clinic will use a brief intervention framework and collaborate with mental health care coordinators to facilitate engagement and interventions focussed on co-morbid issues. Consumers will be able to access up to four clinical sessions to engage, build their knowledge and develop self-management strategies.

At a service level, the clinic has the potential to contribute to hospital avoidance by fostering improved community based care and decreasing crisis presentations to Emergency Departments (EDs). The development of collaborative working relationships that are developed amongst service providers within EDs, acute mental health units, and community based care, offer potential for capacity building.

REFERENCES


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