

## **Service user and carer involvement in assessment and skills simulation in the pre registration mental health branch programme at Edge Hill University**

The involvement of service users and carers in mental health education programmes has been of interest and of growing significance, nationally and at Edge Hill University's Faculty of Health. From a national perspective the growing body of evidence of its effectiveness, when fully integrated into educational programmes is overwhelming (MHHE/NIMHE, 2004 and Clarke 2004).

At Edge Hill University, the validation of the Mental Health Branch Programme in 2005 was an ideal opportunity to move away from a tokenistic use of service users and carers to a full and meaningful integration into the programme. The frame work to guide this process was (and still is) based on the "levels of measurement" of service users and carer involvement, detailed in the MHHE/NIMHE (2004) publication "Learning from Experience". This set out five levels which briefly are;

- Level One - No Involvement
- Level Two - Limited Involvement
- Level Three - Growing Involvement
- Level Four - Collaboration
- Level Five - Partnership

Since 2005, Edge Hill University's Mental Health branch programme has moved from a level One/Two position to level Four, with a great deal of criteria already established for level Five. The partnership has been best demonstrated in the simulation of communication and assessment skills. This novel way of evaluating student's skills is set within the context of an Observed Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE). The learning outcomes clearly match the key skills expressed in the Knowledge and Skills Framework (DOH 2004) and the Chief Nursing Officers Review of Mental Health Nursing (DOH 2006).

This strong position of Partnership has not been achieved without difficult challenges. These have included; access to service users and carers, who share the values of improving mental health care delivery, appropriate recognition reflected in payment and awareness of the limits of therapeutic earnings, and training and support, including curriculum planning.

The actions taken to resolve such challenges have been successful but are under constant evaluation to resolve the main challenge of maintenance. Access, payment and many of the training issues were resolved through the partnership development with Merseycare NHS Trust service user and carer organisation.

A series of meetings and involvement with the branch programmes validation, from the outset, has enabled a deeper understanding of the aims, direction and the role that service users and carers contribute to the programme. Running through the programme are key themes, one of which is a dedicated service user and carer theme. This theme gives service users and carers complete autonomy in terms of planning and integration into the programme. Methods of delivery and support have been, and continue to be, piloted and evaluated, which continue to have an impact upon the quality of the sessions and the programme as a whole.

It is clear, based on the student's evaluation, that the impact upon mental health training is highly significant in the development of key skills, attitudes, values and confidence. The impact has also been felt by the service users and carers and the mental health branch programme staff.

**References**

Clarke.S (2004) Acute Mental Health Care: Education, Training and Continuing Professional Development for All. National Institute Mental Health England/ Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health/ Department of Health. London. HMSO.

Department of Health (2006) From Values to Action: The Chief Nursing Officers Review of Mental Health Nursing. London. HMSO.

Department of Health (2003) The NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework and Related Development Review: A working Draft. London. HMSO

Tew.J, Gell.C, Forster. S (2004) learning from experience: Involving Service Users and Carers in Mental Health Education and Training. London. MHHE/NIMHE.

**Contact**

William Jackson, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Health, Edge Hill University.

[Jacksonw@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:Jacksonw@edgehill.ac.uk)