

Press Release

11 Feb 2016

Call for improved mental health nursing for homeless patients

The Queen's Nursing Institute (QNI) has called for wider knowledge and awareness among nurses to improve mental healthcare for people experiencing homelessness, at a recent QNI learning day.

Over 50 nurses and other professionals gathered at Deafblind UK National Conference Centre in Peterborough on 27 January to explore ways to improve mental healthcare for people experiencing homelessness.

Lily Makurah, National Programme Manager for Public Mental Health at Public Health England spoke about using the healthcare system to adopt a new approach to early intervention along a public mental health model. She highlighted how this was especially important with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Dr Alice Haynes, Senior Policy and Research Analyst at the NSPCC spoke about the perinatal period and the impacts that homelessness can have on both women and on child development during this period. She highlighted how organisations such as the Anna Freud Centre had worked specifically on issues of attachment with new mothers in hostel settings. She also highlighted the absence of research data in this field. The NSPCC has produced for the QNI homeless health network an online learning resource for nurses on the impact of homelessness on babies.

Cheryl Kipping, Lead Dual Diagnosis Nurse at South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, gave an informative presentation about the interactions between substance use and mental health, and the importance of treating these conditions holistically rather than in isolation or in sequence.

Katie Harrington, Court Liaison Mental Health Nurse at Westminster Magistrates' Court, spoke about the role of a mental health nurse in the court liaison and diversion system and how mental health nursing interacts with the criminal justice system. She highlighted how important it was to undertake accurate assessments of people's mental health before trial.

Evan Jones and Bernie Kastner from the charity St Giles' Trust spoke about their work with mentally ill homeless patients in hospital, and with young people in gangs. They spoke about 'teachable moments' when people are open to change, and their model of work, which involves service users helping each other through peer support.

David Parker-Radford, QNI Homeless Health Project Manager commented:

"Homelessness presents a very real threat to public mental health. In chaotic living circumstances, identifying mental health issues can be challenging. The QNI has developed a Mental Health and Homelessness Guidance Resource and a model health assessment with mental health questions to help nurses in practice. For vulnerable people, it is very important that the nurse they see not only has the compassion, but also the training and knowledge to be able to deliver care in the most appropriate way."

The presentations can be found on the QNI's website at: http://www.qni.org.uk/for_nurses/homeless_health/homeless_health_events/mental_healthcare .

The QNI's assessment tool for people who are homeless can be downloaded here: http://www.qni.org.uk/for_nurses/homeless_health/health_assessment_tool

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Notes:

The QNI's Homeless Health Conference will take place in London on Friday 17 June. For more information including speakers visit: <http://www.qni.org.uk/events/214>

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