



Challenging ideas in mental health

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A member of the course team saw the play, *A Quiet Day on Roundhay Wing* at a MIND conference and what they particularly liked was the impact of the service user perspective, so I suppose in summary the play of itself was actually challenging the ideas and diverse perspective which was one of the main aims of the course. The play also has some sense of humour, and I suppose they didn't want it to be so serious as such, and they got the message across, and at the end of the day it's about getting the message across about what happens to the service users when they do become in-patients, because service users actually sometimes can feel very marginalised and in that sort of environment, and to some extent feel got at or feel their needs are not being met, or they're not being listened to, and I think that comes across in the play that there's a disregard for them within that sort of environment, but that may not necessarily be so in reality but they wanted to get that message across as to how people actually feel.

Both service users and the professionals, and the health professionals, discuss the play in some audio recordings because they both wanted to show the different perspectives, service user as someone with an in-patient facility and some of the issues that they are faced with, and the professionals equally wanted to show the same thing to the service users, so they were showing both their competing perspectives and differences that they sometimes have to face within that environment. The nursing services coming from the professional, the health professional background, even though they may be a nurse, remember they're working towards a trained member of staff and as such it will give them an insight into how health professionals feel in the role, in their role as serving service users in a mental health setting, but equally for the students to also be aware of how the service user sees the issues from their perspective.

What I would like the students to actually take away from this is that in reality sometimes it's very difficult for the practitioners to actually achieve the full equality of service provision for that individual, even though the Government has put forward a number of policies and procedures for health professionals, and demonstrating how they should be meeting their needs. In reality that can be difficult because of the lack and a lot of it is lack of resources. But I feel that the students should always be reminded that there should be an equality of service for all in that setting, and this play actually again makes them think about that, that they should be always striving to provide the best, and to meet the needs of the service users.

So in looking at the whole issue around the balance between the use of medication and other therapies in mental healthcare, the aim of this course is actually to give a balanced perspective, so we've demonstrated that medication has got its use, but equally we've also shown that therapies are very important, particularly cognitive behavioural therapy which is a well known one now and has been used for several years, but I suppose what I'd like to remind individuals is that it's not a recipe for every single mental health problem. I mean for some of the less serious mental health problems, for example people with depressive conditions as a result of a loss, counselling or sort of brief therapy could actually help them to get over it without medication, but for the more serious problems people do require medication, but they also may require it alongside a therapy, and so it's about assessing each individual case to some extent, and being very sure of what that person, again, meeting their needs and what they require, and then providing a programme of care to meet that individual needs.

There's a large section of the audio where there's a discussion about recovery of mental health, so in trying to define what they mean by recovery in the mental health context, and why it is so hotly debated, again, to sort of raise this issue with the students is just to look at recovery, and recovery is seen now as a radical idea. Recovery is about helping the individual to reclaim their lives with a good supportive network. It's about taking control of their illness but this is really important when you think about recovery, it's not abandoning an individual and leaving them once they've got over their problem, and to say that's it, you're recovered, you can now go off and do your own thing, it's about having a system, a supportive system available to them, so that if they did need help or support again then that it's available, but the whole essence of recovery is actually is not to label someone that they've got a mental health problem for life, but that you can recover, you can live a very satisfying life, but that you can also if it reoccurs, you can also seek help again.

From some things you can totally recover, I mean I've mentioned already about a depressive episode; people do recover from depression, but some of the more serious illnesses like schizophrenia, I mean you may not fully recover from it, but you may have periods where you have wellness, where you feel at ease with yourself, and you're coping, and so to some extent you may not have a full recovery, but you're recovering from that particular episode and I suppose, if anything, the whole thing about doing K272 is to remind us that mental health problems can be viewed as something that you can get over, or you can get over to a certain level, and that's a message I want to get across. You can live very successfully with a problem but you have to also have, as I said before, a network of support available to you and that's possibly what people do not have. Someone with just a listening ear is enough for you; you don't need to have a fully fledged counsellor or a cognitive behavioural therapist available to you.

Some of the main points I'd like the students to take away from this course are that to understand and take account of the service users' experiences, and to challenge the stereotypical responses that people have to mental health, the media portrayal of mental health, the service provision of mental health, and as a nurse and student as well it's about respecting and valuing what people have to offer, even if they have got an illness, and as some of those skills actually are learnt skills, but I think inherent in you, you have to want to be able to help individuals, but help them by enabling them to talk about their problems.