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How a hospital practice nurse is helping to ensure that a mental health unit takes care of both the mental and physical wellbeing of its service users

Meeting the physical needs of mental health clients

In this article...

- ▶ The role of the general nurse in mental healthcare
- ▶ Why there is a need to improve the physical healthcare provision for patients with mental health problems

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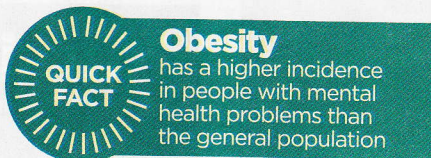
Abstract Roberts L (2011) Meeting the physical needs of mental health clients. *Nursing Times*; 107: 25, 16.

In recognition of recommendations set out in the government's strategy document *No Health Without Mental Health* (Department of Health, 2011), I was appointed as a hospital practice nurse for a mental health unit to implement the government's strategy and give equal weight to the importance of patients' mental and physical health. There is a real need to enhance the physical healthcare provision for patients experiencing mental health problems – to improve treatment outcomes for clients we must promote a holistic approach to their care and address their individual needs.

Mental health patients have higher incidences of respiratory problems, cardiovascular disease, infectious diseases, obesity and high cholesterol than the general population (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, 2006). I support care at the unit and work closely and in partnership with general practice services to:

- » Ensure continuity in both assessing and treating patients with chronic conditions;
- » Help patients understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle.

My main objective has been to implement physical health monitoring through comprehensive assessment and planning for all patients; I also work with the multi-disciplinary team to address patients' physical healthcare needs. The role has helped strengthen services, ensuring a clear healthcare pathway so patients have the same access to health education, screening and services as people living in the community. As well as being responsible for all patients' healthcare needs, I ensure they are assessed on admission and registered with a GP.



As some patients have long-term conditions, I provide education and ongoing assessment as well as day-to-day support for both the multidisciplinary team and nursing teams so all patients have comprehensive physical healthcare care plans. I educate staff on how to manage chronic diseases and offer advice on health promotion, wound management, women's health, blood-borne viruses and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. This enhances the mental health and wellbeing of all patients as well as helping them understand their treatment.

Part of my role is to ensure all patients are offered one-to-one support for their physical health needs. Following an initial assessment on admission, we develop a clear baseline picture of each patient's health, which is used to plan appropriate care and treatment. Once they have had their appointment with me, patients have the opportunity to talk about their health needs and concerns in confidence.

Through this service a more proactive approach to healthcare has developed and we have forged stronger links with primary care, ensuring continuity of care and treatment. My ongoing priorities will be to closely monitor patients with chronic diseases and establish links in the community for them to access on discharge from the unit. This will allow continuity of care for our patients and enable them to have a good understanding of their physical needs and access appropriate help.

We anticipate that in future there will be more opportunities for this service to expand – such as offering smoking cessation support groups – and that more staff training and support will be offered to increase understanding of the physical needs of the patients they care for. Through audit and patient surveys we will be able to establish exactly how my role is enhancing our patients' experience and how we can improve and develop this crucial service. **NT**

References

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