

VOX's response to the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) pre-registration nursing programmes consultation.

VOX is a national mental health service user led organization based within Scotland which aims to give a voice to mental health service users. We aim to drive policy and practice, facilitate partnership working and strengthen the voice of people who have or have had a mental health problem. We aim to do this by using a range of innovative and accessible consultation methods to involve members.

It was felt that given the contact that nursing staff have with mental health service users, and that this contact happens in a stressful environment (which can potentially effects the mental health of individuals), that VOX should consult with its membership. We also consulted with other mental health service users from local groups on the issue of how we train/educate nurses to ensure that issues relating to mental health are fully explored.

VOX felt as though the consultation questionnaire produced by the NMC was inaccessible for the majority of people, and that as mental health service users are a key stakeholder in nursing, being a recipient of services, that the consultation should be looking to understand their views. We were therefore unable to utilize the document which had been produced, and had to find a more inclusive approach to obtaining information from mental health service users in Scotland.

To do this VOX held a service user led event within Edinburgh on the 22nd January 08, where a number of mental health service user led organizations, projects and VOX members were invited to attend. In addition to this VOX held a focus group in Ayrshire, and the Highlands Users Group held a discussion as part of their Friday Forum on some of the key issues in relation to nursing and mental health.

The following questions were developed by the VOX board to ascertain key issues in relation to nursing and mental health.

1. What level of qualification do you think nurses should have? (Diploma or degree?)
2. Where should nurses be trained? What proportion in hospital or community (e.g. voluntary sector/anywhere outside hospital)

3. What level of understanding/experience of mental health issues do you think general nurses should have?
4. Are there any specific issues that should be considered in relation to nursing and people's mental health?
5. How could we be mindful of mental health issues when it comes to selection, recruitment and training of nursing staff?

Ideas were coded and the most commonly repeated responses are the key '*themes*' which emerged from the discussions, we have quoted responses when available to exemplify the repeating ideas. In addition to this we have included issues to illustrate minority opinions which were given.

Question 1. What level of qualification do you think nurses should have? (Diploma or degree?)

Theme: Factors such as empathy, humanity and inherent values are of importance, the issue around whether it is a degree or a diploma detracts from the important issues.

Other factors related to this theme were that people skills are the necessary prerequisite to becoming a nurse, some suggested there is a danger on the emphasis being on academic qualification as it takes the discussion away from the essential qualities which a nurse should possess. Life experience is equally as important.

The philosophy of nursing is what is important, it was suggested that the content of courses should be influenced by service users and carers. It was agreed that degrees do not make good nurses.

Quote "It shouldn't be about intellectual ability, its common sense and kindness that are important"

Quote "*I want to be cared about not cared for*".

Important Minority Issues:

- were that a Degree these days is a fairly basic level of qualification.

Question 2.

Where should nurses be trained? What proportion in hospital or community (e.g. voluntary sector/anywhere outside hospital)

Theme: Nurses should be trained in both the community and the hospital and the ability to transfer skills across.

Theme: Community training should be emphasized, firstly it helps nurses to understand the wider social and environmental factors within the community that impact on mental health and secondly it helps nurses to see the whole person and not just an illness.

The value of the voluntary sector is important, some people suggested that it may be helpful to be based within a community setting prior to being a hospital setting as this would ensure that nurses see 'whole people' as opposed to an illness, it was felt that it would help nurses to understand recovery and prevent detachment.

Quote "we need them (nurses) to see the whole person, we're not an illness"

Important Minority Issues:

- Team dynamic was also felt to be important, and issues around introducing students into the community. The method of introducing nurses into the community should be well thought through.
- Some people felt that it would be helpful to bring back clinical nurse teachers to support students and ward staff.
- It was also felt that it would be helpful to gain experience from more than one hospital.
- Nurses are often feeling demoralized in the acute sector.

Question 3.

What level of understanding/experience of mental health issues do you think general nurses should have?

Theme: Mental health affects everyone, it was felt that increased awareness would benefit not only the nursing staff and those receiving treatment but also the wider society.

Mental health affects everyone and mental illness affects one in four therefore all nurses should have a better level of understanding.

It was also felt that there should be a range of expertise within teams which ensures that adequate responses are given. If expertise isn't available it should be brought in.

Theme: The lack of understanding currently can mean that those who have a mental health problem may not get effective treatment when it comes to their physical health.

Important Minority Issues

- Discussion took place around people's recovery as a continuum, and that through individual stories the importance of friendship, work and creativity etc would be understood.
- The links between other conditions and mental health should be better understood.
- Knowledge base of medication management is important
- More liaison staff are required
- Emphasis on mental health rather than illness is important.
- Mental Health First Aid Training should be undertaken by all nursing staff.

Question 4.

Are there any specific issues that should be considered in relation to nursing and people's mental health?

Theme: We all have mental health, and we are all different, therefore equality and diversity issues are important, we need to understand people's background and how that impacts on individuals, and the nursing population should reflect these differences. It was highlighted that it is the **application** of legislation, rights and language is that is of primary importance.

Quote" You need to understand where people are coming from, we're all different"

Important Minority Issues

- The nursing culture in relation to mental health is stigmatizing with nursing staff feeling unable to discuss personal issues around their own mental health.
- Values and behavior on issues relating to sexuality have to be looked at, and the confounding negative impact that this can have on someone with a mental health problem.

- The importance of a specialist dementia nurse was strongly expressed, and the difference that this would make to many individuals who have dementia.
- The importance of lifelong learning for nurses was also discussed.
- Alcohol and drug issues were discussed, and the links with mental health and suicide.

Question 5.

How could we be mindful of mental health issues when it comes to selection, recruitment and training of nursing staff?

Theme: The additional qualities that someone with a lived experience can bring when it comes to selection, recruitment and training was emphasized. There were a number of ways in which this could be achieved and some people felt that mental health service users should be involved throughout the process, the strong mind/body links were felt to justify an intense level of mental health service user involvement.

Quote” **we need to be involved, we know what we need”**

Important Minority Issues

- Empowerment is therapeutic for mental health service users.
- Equality and diversity impact assessments were suggested as a mechanism to ensure that within nursing that legislation is adhered to.
- The stigma within nursing may prevent nurses with mental health problems from being recruited

To summarise:

It is recommended therefore that personal qualities should be the key factor when it comes to training nurses, and VOX would recommend that discussion around level of qualification is not as relevant as how we nurture these personal qualities.

Understanding the social environment someone comes from is extremely important in terms of mental health, hence the environment we train nurses in must take into consideration factors around recovery and seeing a ‘whole person’ as opposed to an illness.

An increased awareness of mental health problems for all nurses would benefit everyone, increased awareness should be at an individual level, and within teams (where teams utilize the knowledge of experts who can share this information).

The application of equality and diversity issues and human rights etc is extremely important; this should be reflected throughout the nursing establishment at an organizational level in addition to an individual level.

Given the fact that we all have mental health, and that mental illness affects one in four it is felt that those who have experience of a mental health problem should be involved throughout the recruitment, selection and training processes as they bring additional qualities with them that should not be underestimated in terms of ensuring the correct values are underpinning nursing.