

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

The New 2 Forensic Programme for all Staff in the Shannon Clinic

Introduction

The introduction of the New to Forensic Programme (N2F) for all staff (clinical and non-clinical) working in the Shannon Clinic, which is the medium secure unit for Northern Ireland.

Shannon Clinic is a 34 bedded inpatient facility which opened in 2005 and forensic services are a relatively new concept in Northern Ireland. At the beginning, staff had little qualifications or experience working in forensic healthcare settings. From the outset, we were very aware that an adequate and competent workforce is fundamental to the success of a new and developing service.

Background

The N2F teaching programme was developed by the School of Forensic Mental Health Scotland (SoFMH) and adapted for use in Northern Ireland. It's a multidisciplinary team, a multiagency practice-based learning approach to developing staff's skills and enhances the quality of care for the patients. All staff complete the programme as part of their induction and linked to a personal professional development profile.

New to forensic mental health teaching programme (N2F)

The education programme is for clinical and non-clinical staff. The programme is designed to promote self-directed learning and is multi-disciplinary and multi-agency in approach. The programme student will be supported throughout their period of study (recommended six months to one year depending on previous experience) by a mentor who is an experienced forensic mental health care worker.

Chapters

The programme has fourteen chapters, each of which (excluding chapter one) includes case scenarios of patients in various settings, from the community to high secure psychiatric care:

1. Aims and teaching methods.
2. Understanding mental disorder.
3. Definitions, principles and policy for mentally disordered offenders.
4. Civil mental health legislation.

5. Forensic mental health services.
6. Attitudes to mentally disordered offenders
7. Forensic mental health services and the criminal justice system: understanding the relationship.
8. Psychiatric defences and legislation for mentally disordered offenders.
9. Assessment, treatment and management of mentally disordered offenders.
10. Multidisciplinary working, communication and managing difference.
11. Safety of staff, patients and public including risk assessment and management.
12. Taking account of the views of users and carers.
13. Forensic Learning Disability Services.
14. Mental Health in Prison.

The patients and carers advocates were involved in the development of the programme and deliver the training to staff. There is a specific chapter allocated to the user and carer perspective. It is envisaged that patients who have a lived experience of forensic settings could also deliver on the programme.

Staff progress through the programme at their own pace, supported by a mentor which can take 3 to 12 months to complete. The mentor is a competent practitioner familiar to the practice setting and to the service user group.

It's a self-directed, problem-based learning approach, challenging participants to seek solutions to real and actual problems.

Case studies are used in context to stimulate curiosity and promote learning of the subject matter.

The participant keeps a reflective diary which promotes planning and achieving learning goals.

An RQIA Inspection (2016) reported:

'Staff who met with inspectors reflected positively about their experience of the training that they had received'.

'Patients stated they were treated with dignity and respect, and that staff were considerate and responded compassionately when help was needed'.

'Nursing staff in all three wards felt the nursing management within the ward was effective and supportive'.

An evaluation of the N2F Programme carried out by Walker et al (2018) highlighted that practice based learning had a positive impact for both staff and the service user.

The following comments were fed back from staff that completed the N2F Programme.

“Before the programme I had a negative view of mentally disordered offenders. Then I did the programme and it helped me to see the person as a person, not the offence.”

“I felt that I had been thrown in at the deep end and then doing the programme my confidence grew.”

“It supplemented what you were learning on the ground. I felt more knowledgeable and skilled”

“I found the case studies were very good in making you reflect on your practice, attitude and views.”

“We have a multidisciplinary and multiagency approach to care, specifically related to the course, these roles were further explored and this was very useful in appreciating the wide range of disciplines.”

“It develops your practice and understanding and as a result makes you a more effective practitioner.”

The N2F programme does not only educate staff but also encourages positive multidisciplinary team working. Staff feel valued and gives them a greater understanding of what forensic healthcare is and provides them with skills in order to deliver a high quality of care to the service users. It also provides a platform for some staff who wish to further their knowledge specific to forensic healthcare with the local Universities.

**Noel Mc Donald,
Forensic Network Manager,
Shannon Clinic**