Mental Health in the Australian population – Additional resources

Consumer perspective

Language & stigma

I have heard media make statements such a “schizophrenic did...” when schizophrenia is an illness not a species! (Carer, #134)[1]

- Language and labelling of people with mental illness can cause stigma. Some people prefer the term ‘service user’ or ‘consumer’ of mental health services rather than ‘patient’. The word ‘patient’ is reported to be passive and engenders an inactive outlook, or something being done to them rather than a proactive outlook on life. However for the purpose of this activity we use these terms interchangeably.
- The mental health council of Australia has published a report on consumer and carer experience of stigma from mental health and other health professionals, suggesting:[1]
  1. Language and stigma reduction
  2. Recognition of the role of consumer/carer representatives in providing feedback and better directing services
  3. A change in attitudes of staff to consumers

- Families
  1. The Commonwealth funded ‘children of parents with a mental illness’ (COPMI) provides research and information about developing a family focus when dealing with a parent who has a mental illness – including children and keeping them informed in an age-appropriate manner. This approach improves the outcome for the whole family. More information such as e-learning courses and learning material produced for GPs, is available here:[2]
  2. Putting families at the centre of recovery [3]

- More information
  National mental health consumer organisation
  National mental health consumer and carer forum

References
2. COPMI. GPs
3. COPMI Gems. Keeping families in mind. 2013
Carer perspective

The mental health council of Australia has published a collection of articles providing up-to-date perspectives on mental health and well-being in Australia: [1].

1. Carers are key members of the treatment team but also have their own risks and needs when it comes to their own emotional and physical health. A video resource is available. [2]
2. The role of young carers deserves a particular focus. A video resource is available. [3]
3. There are various initiatives and programs available, a GP’s awareness of these can assist carers. ‘Care aware’ provides some more information on their website. [4]

The National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum has published information about what consumers and carers want. [5]

References
2. Care Aware. Health professional.
3. Care Aware. Young carers
4. Care Aware. Carer Resources.
5. NMHCCF. What consumers and carers want

Women vs. men

- Women seek more help from mental health services when compared with men: anxiety disorders 18% vs. 11%, and mood disorders 7.1% vs. 5.3%. [1]
- The Mindframe Project offers more information [2] [3]

References
3. The Mindframe Project. Media resources.
Youth

- Sane Australia inform that at least one third of young people have had an episode of mental illness by the time they are 25 years old. [1]
- The Mindframe Project states that:[2]
  - Lower income homes/step-blended parents/sole parent families have higher rates of mental health problems.
  - GPs, school-based counsellors and paediatricians provide the services that are most frequently used by young people with mental health problems. Younger children (4-12) were more likely to visit paediatricians and GPs, while older children were more likely to visit school-based counselling services.
  - Even among young people with the most severe mental health problems, only 50% receive professional help. Parents reported that help was too expensive or they didn’t know where to get it, and that they thought they could manage on their own.

- The RACGP recommends screening for youth mental illness using the HEADSS framework:[3]
  
  H= Home situation
  E = Education/employment
  A = Activities
  D = Drugs
  S = Sexuality
  S = Suicide

  - Early identification and intervention is more effective than dealing with mental health problems once they have become entrenched. For more information, visit the RACGP red book section 3.3.

References

1. Sane Australia. Facts and figures about mental illness.
Medical Practitioners

a) Doctors at risk – results of Beyondblue’s national mental health survey of doctors and medical students 2013 [1] [2]

- Medical Practitioners reported substantially higher rates of psychological distress (K-10) and attempted suicide compared to both the Australian population and other Australian professionals
- Young and female medical practitioners appeared to have higher levels of general and specific mental health problems and reported greater work stress
- Depression and anxiety are common in doctors and medical students, but many won’t seek help despite their awareness and understanding of the effects of depression and anxiety: Stigmatising attitudes regarding the performance of doctors with mental health conditions persist.
- GPs appear to have a better work-life balance, with fewer hours worked, fewer mental health illnesses or less significant psychological distress and possibly drinking less alcohol when compared to other medical specialists

b) Help for Medical Practitioners

- The RACGP offers members a GP support program, which provides free, confidential counselling by trained psychologists for a wide range of issues including depression, anxiety, substance abuse and handling work pressure.[3]
- Each state in Australia has a doctors’ health advisory service. These services are predominantly voluntary organisations which are not linked to the medical board. The Australian Medical Association (AMA) provides more details and contact information .[4]

c) Further reading:

Beyondblue has published a systematic literature review about the mental health of doctors in 2010. [5]

References

2. Beyondblue. National Mental Health Survey of Doctors and Medical Students: Executive summary
3. RACGP. Membership. The GP support program
4. The Australian Medical Association. Doctors’ Health Advisory Services
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations

There numerous challenges for clinicians when it comes to mental health in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander setting. Dr Ernest Hunter suggests in his 2014 AFP article: [1]

“Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is a privilege. To be effective requires respect, curiosity and continuity. Local, rather than esoteric, knowledge is important, as is engagement. For instance, never underestimate the importance of a cup of tea”

In 2008, almost one-third of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (16–24 years of age) had high or very high levels of psychological distress—more than twice the rate of young non-Indigenous Australians. [2]

- Indigenous young people were hospitalised more commonly for mental and behavioural disorders, at 1.8 times the non-Indigenous rate (specialised psychiatric care) while non-specialized psychiatric care was at 3.7 times the non-Indigenous rate. The leading causes were schizophrenia, alcohol misuse and reactions to severe stress.
- Indigenous Australians accounted for 6.5% of community mental health service contacts in 2008–09—close to 3 times the rate for non-Indigenous Australians.
- In 2010, Indigenous people were two-and-a-half times more likely to die from ‘intentional self-harm’ than were non-Indigenous people.
- Deaths from intentional self-harm are especially high for Indigenous people aged 34 years or younger, particular among Indigenous males

Further reading and resources:

An introduction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols and perspectives

Mental health focus in indigenous setting

Mental health cultural competence

Mental Health in Multicultural Australia

National Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

References
2. Australian Government. AIHW. The health and welfare of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
Key publications:

- A Government resource about mental health care in Australia can be accessed here (subsection on background knowledge of particular interest)
- Publication: Mental health services in Australia
- A European review of the Australian health system
- Further reading list via resource section