

Pacific Heads of Nursing & Midwifery Meeting

Réunion des chefs des soins infirmiers et obstétricaux du Pacifique



Strengthening Mental Health Services

Mental Health Nurses Pacific Community of Practice

Mental Health Nurses Pacific Community of Practice offers education and professional development for mental health nurses in Pacific, including the wide range of roles such as hospital-based care in specialist and general settings.

The 2022 program is collaboratively developed by the nurses working in Pacific Island countries and territories, with support from St. Vincent's Mental Health and the Thomas Trauer Fund, St. Vincent's Foundation.

Weekly online sessions are open to attend, including all nurses who work in mental health roles, and nurses in general health roles who would like to learn more about mental health care.

1. BACKGROUND

The Inaugural Pacific Heads of Nursing and Midwifery (PHoNM) Meeting in 2020 recommended support for nursing specialisation, including career pathways for specialty nursing positions.

Mental health nurses are highly specialised and their work is fundamental to the success of mental health services in Pacific Islands and Territories. Mental health can be an exciting and meaningful career for a nurse, with the expertise and knowledge to give an overview of physical and mental health.

Mental health nurses are involved in new practices and programs for prevention, early recognition, intervention and treatments to address the mental health needs of the Pacific communities.

Forums offer the opportunity for connecting with other nursing professionals, share ideas and tips for good practice, including offering advice and support to each other, and growing connections with other health professionals.

2. PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

St. Vincent's Hospital Melbourne has provided resources for co-ordinating activities and structures for the new Community of Practice, with education using Project Echo Model of a telehealth clinic, and professional peer exchange, as well as a pilot mentoring program from March to October 2022.

2.1 Professional Development

130 nurses have registered to access the professional development sessions, receiving links for the live weekly sessions, plus additional material, and recorded sessions by email each week. From March-June 2022, 87 nurses have attended at least one session with an average of 25 nurses attending each session. The attendance has ranged from highest number of 49, lowest number 15. Each session includes a feedback poll, and the sessions have been consistently highly rated as relevant to the workplace, helpful for the nurse to reflect on the topic, and will improve confidence to discuss this topic with others. As well as the quantitative satisfaction data, the qualitative data in the monitoring and evaluation strategy indicated that the opportunity to talk with specialists and colleagues from other settings was highly valued. Topics put forward in initial planning day in December 2021 include engaging community, restrictive interventions, workforce development, indicators, family focused care, mental health education and clinical governance.

2.2 Mentoring Program

Twenty nurses are participating in the mentoring program May-Oct 2022, including 13 nurses from Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea and 7 nurses from Melbourne, Australia. Participating in this program will build understanding of the process of mentoring, as well as learning some specific skills required to implement important techniques such as personal and professional goal setting, developing career options, overcoming personal obstacles, building trust, giving critical feedback and more. Nurses are invited as mentors or mentees, and as a peer exchange with 2-way learning and opportunities. Mentors and mentees are nurses with skills and interest to support other mental health nurses to help build their confidence, self-awareness, professional skills, network and develop a greater understanding of their potential as a leader to influence and motivate others.

2.3 More about St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne

St Vincent's is a tertiary public healthcare service. We provide a range of services, including acute medical and surgical services, emergency and critical care, aged care, diagnostics, rehabilitation, allied health, mental health, palliative care and residential care. We work with a vast network of collaborative partners to deliver high quality treatment, teaching, education and research. We have more than 7,000 staff and 880 beds in daily use across our services. At Mental Health's International Unit, St. Vincent's staff work with overseas colleagues delivering training on campus and in the region. Programs contribute to the WHO Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Mental Health, Melbourne.

3. CHALLENGES

The potential technology limitations were a strong consideration in deciding to limit the sessions to 60 minutes, to record the short didactic presentations for nurses to review on demand post session if needed, and to prepare a careful communication strategy for supporting participants with limited or no experienced in telehealth. It was also noted that topics that are aligned with clinical priorities may be different in every country.

Barriers to attending

- High Clinical Demand and lack of dedicated training time within clinical roles. At times, the program can be difficult to attend with nurses experiencing a high clinical demand. Lack of dedicated time within clinical roles can also be a barrier, with nurses finding it difficult to include time for training and complete their workloads.

- Lack of backfill to attend professional development opportunities. The lack of other staff to provide services while someone is away for training is a known barrier with face-to-face training, and many mental health services in Pacific settings face workforce shortages. The mental health and wellbeing workforce needs to grow significantly to deliver the treatment, care and support that Pacific communities need, as well as to meet increasing demand for mental health services. However, research shows that positive and early exposure to the mental health care is one of the strongest indicators for nurses to choose a mental health career, as well as countering stigma and community perceptions of working in the mental health sector. Increasing awareness of mental health careers and the opportunities available in the sector is therefore a key focus of the Mental Health Nurses Community of Practice.
- Unable to connect to the telehealth session due to technology difficulties, or lack of telehealth equipment. Going forward small infrastructure grants to support the purchase of computers, camera, and microphones to support telehealth would be low cost and valuable. The training is accessible through the more readily available mobile telephones rather than requiring laptops or desktop computers with camera, sound and internet or video conference equipment. But using phone can also limit communication with the online group. It is particularly difficult to present or facilitate the professional development sessions using only a phone screen.

4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Mental Disorders are the second most common cause of Years Lost to Death (YLDs), and a significant burden when measured as global disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs). DALYs increased during childhood and decreased after 35 years. Globally, depressive disorders and anxiety disorders were the most common mental disorders, schizophrenia and eating disorders were the least common¹. Released in June 2022, the WHO World Mental Health Report calls for all stakeholders to deepen the value and commitment given to mental health, reshape the environments that influence mental health, and strengthen the systems that care for mental health²

The Steering Group for the MH Nurses Pacific Community of Practice is comprised of key partners in the Mental Health Nurses Pacific Community of Practice. The 2022 pilot education and leadership program is collaboratively developed by the nurses working in Pacific Islands countries and territories, with support from St. Vincent's Mental Health and guidance from this Steering Group.

¹ GBD 2019 Mental Disorders Collaborators. [Global, regional, and national burden of 12 mental disorders in 204 countries and territories, 1990–2019: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019](#). *Lancet Psychiatry*. Published online January 10, 2022. doi:10.1016/S2215-0366(21)00395-3

² World mental health report: transforming mental health for all. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022. Licence: [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO](#).

Steering group members to:

- Provide knowledge and expertise.
- Advise and make recommendations as to potential opportunities and directions for growth.
- Facilitate the work of the Mental Health Nurses Pacific Community of Practice by ensuring open and honest representation, creating a climate of consensus and peer support
- Promote good will and trust within community of interest and the community at large; and
- Act as a liaison between participants, organisations, and other stakeholders where appropriate.

4.1 Recommendations for governments and development partners:

Recognise Mental Health as a specialised clinical service of priority. Pacific mental health nurses are the face of mental health care for many people, and represent a long-term engagement with the health system for many people with a mental illness. Pacific mental health nurses work with people with mental illnesses, supporting people access good quality affordable health care, which can vastly improve the quality of their lives and to recover from their illness.

Note WHO's 2022 World Mental Health Report³ which calls for building community-based networks of interconnected services that move away from custodial care in psychiatric hospitals and cover a spectrum of care and support through a combination of mental health services that are integrated in general health care; community mental health services; and services beyond the health sector.

Invest in workforce strategies, including digital health capacity and opportunities for online collaboration with the aim of moving knowledge, instead of people, especially with rural and remote health care settings.

Promote professional development opportunities for health workforce, including networking forums to break down silos, collaborate on solutions, and upskill workers.

³ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049338> World mental health report: transforming mental health for all. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.