

Evaluating critical factors that can assist nurses to reduce the use of restrictive practices in forensic mental health inpatient settings - Promoting positive and safe care.

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ABSTRACT

Introduction/Background

A decade long focus on reducing and eliminating the use of restrictive practices in Australia (including seclusion and restraint) has resulted in some services achieving reductions in this area. However, forensic mental health services continue to report high rates of seclusion and restraint. There is limited research available to explain the disparity in the use of restrictive practices between forensic and other inpatient mental health services.

Aim/Purpose of the project

This qualitative research study examined the experiences of nurses working in an inpatient forensic mental health setting. The research aimed to (i) report on the experiences of nurses working in this practice setting, (ii) describe their perceived unique skill set and how it assists them to manage challenging patient behaviours, and (iii) evaluate how their skills and experiences can inform policy and practice changes to achieve a sustainable reduction in restrictive practices.

Methods/Process/Who is being studied

The study was conducted at one Australian forensic mental health service. Thirty-two nurses participated and data were collected using semi-structured interviews and analysed using inductive content analysis.

Results/Outcome

The study identified four categories that influenced practice experiences: (i) working in a challenging but interesting environment, (ii) clinical expertise in a speciality area, (iii) the experience of aggression and resilience as a protective factor, and (iv) the importance of leadership and teamwork.

Recommendations/Conclusion

The forensic mental health care setting is highly specialised, complex and often unpredictable. Forensic and non-forensic mental health populations present with different care needs. This study provides insight into the experiences of front-line workers which may account for the higher rates of seclusion and restraint rates reported in this area. It reveals the impact of aggression on staff and highlights the critical influence of training, leadership, and teamwork on reducing restrictive practices. Further work is required to build a resilient forensic mental health nursing workforce to improve their health and well-being.