

Mental health pharmacy education – a qualitative evaluation

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AIM

Mental health is a national health priority area and medicines are a major modality of treatment. Stigma associated with mental illness may interfere with professional practice and pharmacists are often not confident in counselling on psychotropic medicines. It is therefore essential that pharmacy students have advanced communication skills and confidence when interacting with consumers with a mental illness.

The aim of this study was to conduct a qualitative evaluation of an innovative teaching intervention involving trained mental health consumer educators (MHCE) for pharmacy students.

METHOD

All third year pharmacy students at the University of Sydney participated in the mental health tutorial. Following this tutorial in the 3rd year of the 4 year Bachelor of Pharmacy program, students were invited to participate in one of a series of focus groups. The mental health tutorial involved trained MHCEs from the Schizophrenia Fellowship of NSW with students practising their communication and counselling skills. This evaluation forms part of a larger evaluation of this study. Focus groups were transcribed verbatim and thematically content analysed.

OUTCOMES

To date three focus groups have been conducted with the pharmacy students (n=11). Overall participants found that practising communication and counselling skills with MHCEs to be very beneficial. Key themes identified included an increased knowledge and insight into mental illness and improved understanding of mental health stigma which resulted in more positive attitudes. Furthermore many participants indicated their intention to increase their level of interaction with consumers with a mental illness and improve the professional nature of that interaction. This qualitative study highlights the value of using MHCE in pharmacy education.