Specialist Mental Health Services for Older People: Workforce Development

The NSW Service Plan for Specialist Mental Health Services for Older People (SMHSOP) 2005-2015 identifies workforce development and capacity building as a key issue and strategic priority for the Older People’s Mental Health (OPMH) program. Workforce development is critical in both the mental health and aged care sectors due to issues surrounding recruitment, retention, and ongoing professional development, particularly in rural and remote areas. In addition, the OPMH program has expanded rapidly, bringing substantial workforce development and training challenges to address the care needs of older people who present with mental health issues. A range of SMHSOP workforce strategies have been progressed under the SMHSOP Service Plan.

SMHSOP guide to orientation and brief clinical induction resource
The SMHSOP brief clinical induction resource was developed in 2007 as an electronic template for the former Area Health Services (AHS) to insert appropriate local material with the intention of providing a guide to all aspects of SMHSOP practice, assisting services in their own orientation and induction processes, and improving the consistency of such practices across NSW. The resource was reviewed and updated in 2012, and disseminated to LHDs to inform orientation and clinical induction processes for SMHSOP staff.

SMHSOP community workforce surveys
MHDAO undertook a statewide survey of the SMHSOP community workforce in 2007 to ascertain competencies and training priorities for the workforce. This survey identified that 43% of SMHSOP community clinicians had been in this field for two years or less, with varying levels of competence in SMHSOP clinical practice. Recommendations from the survey informed the development of workforce strategies aimed at developing the skills of the SMHSOP workforce and resulted in a number of workforce initiatives.

A broader SMHSOP workforce survey was launched in late 2013, targeting both community and inpatient SMHSOP staff. The 2013 survey aims to build on the 2007 survey by seeking staff demographic data, as well as surveying staff training priorities and self-competency ratings on a range of items that are aligned with the SMHSOP core competencies (below).

SMHSOP Core Competency Project
The development of core competencies was identified in SMHSOP workforce consultations as a priority within SMHSOP in the context of growth in the workforce, the number of new clinicians entering the SMHSOP field, and NSW Health’s commitment to clinical quality and safety and ongoing professional development. Following the rollout of a training package for SMHSOP directors, managers, team leaders, clinical leaders and psychiatrists in 2010, conducted by the NSW Institute of Psychiatry (IoP), the competencies have been implemented and utilised across SMHSOP (particularly in community teams, which were the focus of the core competency project). The aim of the core competencies is to guide professional development, clinical supervision and performance review for SMHSOP clinicians (particularly beginning SMHSOP community clinicians).

Review of OPMH post-graduate programs at the Institute of Psychiatry (IoP) and scholarship initiative

In response to survey findings and recommendations regarding qualifications, competencies and training priorities for NSW SMHSOP clinicians and key OPMH program developments relevant to the SMHSOP workforce, funding was provided to the IoP for the review and revision of the three (3) postgraduate courses in Mental Health (Older Person). The review was informed by the SMHSOP core competencies, SMHSOP Acute Inpatient Unit Model of Care Project, Aboriginal OPMH Project, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse OPMH Project and various Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia (BPSD) training and education strategies.

Funding was also provided to the IoP for the provision of 30 scholarships which enabled SMHSOP clinicians from metropolitan, regional and rural and remote former AHSs to undertake OPMH post graduate training at the IoP.

Desktop video conferencing project

The *NSW Service Plan for SMHSOP* identifies telehealth as a potential model for professional development and clinical supervision for SMHSOP staff working individually or in small teams in rural and remote areas. Funding was provided to purchase desktop video conference equipment for SMHSOP in each former AHS to increase opportunities for greater access to professional development and promote engagement of other services in the care of older people with co-morbid and mental health problems. Clinical Coordinators report that clinical service networks, team functioning and service delivery has improved, particularly in rural and remote areas.

BPSD Training project

The workforce survey undertaken in 2007 highlighted that both managers and clinicians ranked BPSD as their highest training priority for SMHSOP staff. In 2010, MHDAO funded a training program for SMHSOP community and inpatient clinicians in the management of older people with BPSD, and it was followed up with advanced BPSD training workshops. Further BPSD training was implemented for SMHSOP acute inpatient staff, in line with implementation priorities identified in the SMHSOP Acute Inpatient Model of Care Project Report.

BPSD Handbook

Funding was provided to the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) NSW Faculty of Psychiatry of Old Age (FPOA) to develop a handbook on the management of people with BPSD. The Handbook was developed through a collaborative approach between Mental Health and Aged Care staff, consistent with the *NSW Service Plan for SMHSOP*, and is aimed at NSW Health clinical staff in community and inpatient settings that have a key role in the management of older people with BPSD. [http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/dementia/Publications/assessment-mgmt-people-bpsd.pdf](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/dementia/Publications/assessment-mgmt-people-bpsd.pdf)

Current OPMH workforce priorities include:

- Preparing report/s on the SMHSOP workforce survey to inform statewide and Local Health District workforce development and training strategies;
- Working with key services, including adult mental health services and other key services, to improve responses to the needs of older people with mental health issues;
• Working with Local Health District SMHSOP to promote recovery-focused, person-centred approaches to care across NSW; and
• Providing input to broader NSW and national mental health workforce development strategies, including core competency frameworks.