



South West London
Academic, Health and Social Care
 System

Case Studies- Series 3

Tailored Preceptorships for Mental Health Nurses

The transition from student to newly qualified nurse is a challenging time; often determining, or even curtailing, career trajectories for years to come. So in order to better support, develop, and retain mental health nurses through their first year, the SWLS funded South West London and St George's Mental Health Trust (SWLStG) to develop their own innovative new preceptorship programme.

How Best To Meet Needs of New Nurses?

"Newly qualified nurses often have such a high expectation and desire to make a difference. And bridging that gap between theory and the reality of day to day practice can be really problematic."

Catherine Gamble, Head of Nursing, South West London and St George's Mental Health Trust

The Department of Health has been recommending preceptorships since 2010. But after scoping existing programmes the SWLStG team felt it was important to create something specifically tailored to their workforce's needs. After being awarded a SWLS small grant in August 2015 they launched an extensive consultation phase. Various focus groups with ward managers and senior nurses helped identify what skills and knowledge services required.



And perhaps more importantly, what form of support and training newly qualified nurses actually wanted in order to develop from novice to expert.

"It was not necessarily just teaching about the topic, but looking at how you develop resilience, how you deal with staff dynamics, all the key issues NHS staff face that can make life difficult."

Anderson Pustam, Senior Nurse Project Lead, South West London and St George's Mental Health Trust

'Making best practice accepted practice'

Working with Kingston and St George's University the team used this information to devise a bespoke preceptorship programme to pilot between December and April. As well as providing a developmental logbook, covering areas specific to their experience and aspirations, each preceptee was assigned an experienced staff member to act as their personal preceptor and offer monthly supervision. The 36-strong cohort also accessed forums for peer support and reflective practice throughout the pilot.

Highlights and Lessons Learned

In March 2016 they moved on to the evaluation phase, using a mix of questionnaires, interviews, and data from logbooks and supervision. A high response rate - with 32 of 36 preceptees seizing the opportunity to offer valuable feedback on their experience - helped to shape the and further refine the programme.

"The peer support sessions proved to be extremely helpful; the nurses had a safe space to share problems and ways to overcome them. Plus for us, this was a chance to gather feedback to use for ongoing development of the programme."

Anderson Pustam, Senior Nurse Project Lead, South West London and St George's Mental Health Trust

Questionnaires also revealed how quickly the preceptee's sense of

confidence and competence grew to the point where they no longer felt the need for preceptor's one to one support. Whilst interviews with managers and staff suggested a widening awareness of nurses' support and development needs. The project leads were also surprised about the level of support from SWLS.

"I've had grants before that were just about submitting reports. But with SWLS it was very personalised. Kathy Tyler actually became a member of our steering committee, and we found that incredibly useful and powerful."

Catherine Gamble, Head of Nursing, South West London and St George's Mental Health Trust

Next Steps

"I think developing a bespoke programme was a total success. The opportunity to pilot meant that this year we are able to provide an in-house much more in-depth, and evidence-based programme."

Catherine Gamble

The evaluation process has led to improvements that are already benefitting the second, larger cohort of nurses; such as establishing clear learning benchmarks, focusing on practical work, and smaller peer groups. Furthermore, the project's agile framework and rapid response to feedback ensure that all current and future cohorts will also play a crucial part in refining the programme. Looking ahead they also hope to track career development of other preceptees to demonstrate the long-term benefits.

The team's work was recently recognised with a Nursing Times award nomination, and received funding from Health Education England to employ two former preceptees to offer additional support to new intakes. Anderson and the team are clear on the potential wider impact of their work...

"Everything here interlinks and works in parallel and interlinks; preceptorship, rotation, development, etc. So the SWLS grant has really helped us to start a larger, more fluid process that could really help us to develop internally across the board."

Anderson Pustam

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