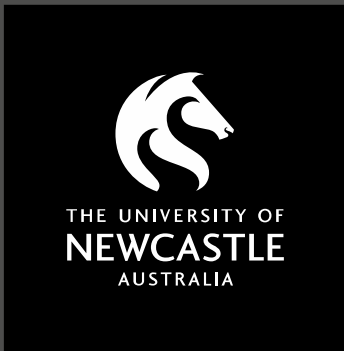


**I've ... completely changed my mindset ...  
it's turned it upside down: Nursing  
students perceptions of being taught by  
Experts by Experience – the COMMUNE  
Study.**



**Brenda Happell, Professor  
School of Nursing and Midwifery  
Service User Academia Symposium  
Wellington 2019**



COMMUNE



# Service user involvement in Mental Health Services

- Clearly embedded in policy in Australia and New Zealand
- Negative attitudes of health professionals pose major barrier to achieving policy goals
- Education influences attitudes

# Service user involvement in MHN education

## Demonstrated:

- more positive attitudes to mental illness, reduced fear and apprehension
- Increased understanding of holistic care
- Increased interest in MHN as a career
- Relevance for all areas of nursing practice

# Service user involvement in MHN education

Despite this:

- service user participation remains limited, ad hoc and often tokenistic

Limited literature exploring nursing students perceptions of the benefits of service user involvement

# Methods

- Focus groups with nursing students at each location
- Students asked to describe the experience of being taught by an EBE:
  - Positives or benefits
  - Negatives or challenges
- Likely impact on nursing practice?
- Importance of mental health skills for nursing more broadly?
- Data analysed thematically

# Findings

## Changing Mindset:

- Exposing stereotypes
- Becoming more reflective



# Changing mindset

## Participants:

- Described profound personal impact of this teaching approach.
- developed a more positive and less stereotypical view of people who access mental health services.
- Became more reflective and with an enhanced capacity to critique of mental health practice previously considered acceptable clinical practices.



# Exposing stereotypes

Participants frequently described their fears about mental illness and apprehension about working in mental health settings. Their perceptions had been tainted by negative portrayals of people labelled with mental illness as dangerous and unpredictable:

*There are ... attitudes that mental health patients are restless and dangerous (Finland).*

# Exposing Stereotypes

Participants also reported their family and friends commonly expressed negative views about people labelled with mental illness about mental health nursing as a profession more broadly:

*I also found people [friends and family] had a really negative idea of the patients ... I remember someone was saying to me ... oh you shouldn't be doing that [mental health nursing] you'll get attacked (Cork, Ireland)*



# Exposing Stereotypes

Participants described the influence of media on their attitudes:

*I feel whether I like it or not my perceptions of mental health have been shaped by television before I came to uni. They've been shaped by the movies I've watched ... so this [teaching by EBE] has helped break down some of those (Australia).*

*Thinking about psychiatry, I thought about things I had seen in movies. About such an institution with people who are all "crazy" (the Netherlands).*



# Exposing stereotypes

Most participants were enthusiastic about taught by an EBE. Some had concerns that EBE would not be capable of undertaking this role and drawing on lived experience rather than clinical or academic knowledge may not produce useful content:

*I felt some prejudice in the back of my head . . . some kind of academic arrogance because they (EBE) are not especially educated in the field (Iceland).*



# Exposing stereotypes

EBE provided a different perspective. This impacted significantly on students and shifted the belief systems they held:

*The Expert by Experience taught me ... to have less prejudices. Because that person was very different from what I thought (the Netherlands).*

*I think I've ... completely changed my mindset and how I see and view people, and in all aspects ... it's turned it upside down. I think she [EBE] ... nailed it, really pressed that in for me... (Australia).*



# Becoming more reflective

Participants described interactions with EBE as a catalyst for reflection on their views and attitudes. EBE challenged to realise their understandings were heavily influenced by clinical perspectives.

*We are trained from the hospital's and the nursing department's point of view. You do not always realize how your own views are limited. You think you are critical and then you realise, when you meet them [EBE], that maybe you are not so critical and broad minded. Why do we do what we do, like using the ICD [International Classification of Diseases] diagnostic system? Sometimes you just do things blindly ...*



# Becoming more reflective

EBE describing their experiences through storytelling was noted by most participants as a very powerful tool to aid their understanding of first-hand experience of mental health services, as one student articulates:

*There's a few stories that she [EBE] shared that have really stuck with me and how she was locked up as a really young person going through grief. And how she was alone that entire time, that really made me question why ... how could this happen? How could they think that this was right? (Australia).*





# Becoming more reflective

The experience also encouraged students to consider the impact of language on consumers, subsequently encouraging them to be more careful and considerate in their use of language:

*She [EBE] gives us insights and even into the language we use and how language used can be quite debilitating to service users because it alienates them...so it opens up your mind into thinking we should watch the way we speak (Dublin, Ireland).*

# Becoming more reflective

EBE facilitated reflective practice, for example this new way of understanding was useful in encouraging a more open, less reactionary, and more autonomous approach to mental health nursing practice:

*:t is about taking my experiences, and ... work towards what I believe is for the good, and not forget the things I reacted to, so I don't fall into something, and be aware when you enter a culture ... not just be led (Norway).*



# Becoming more reflective

The experience facilitated insight into the uniquely taxing nature of listening deeply to another's trauma, which in turn facilitated an awareness of the requirement for self-care for some participants:

*“I think it shows as well ... that it's important to look after ourselves because ... even just listening to the stories you're sometimes emotionally ... drained (Cork, Ireland).”*

# Discussion

- Expert by experience involvement in nursing education has a powerful impact on nursing students, encouraging them to:
  - Understanding stereotypes
  - Challenging their own stereotypes
  - Becoming more reflective
  - Becoming more critical
  - Challenging the medical model

# Discussion

- Impact on students cannot be achieved through any other means, even by fabulous mental health nurse academics like me 😊
- Expert by experience involvement should be included in all health professional programs, preferably through designated academic positions
- Unfortunately involvement remains minimal and ad hoc despite growing evidence base

# Acknowledgements

The whole wonderful Commune team – too many names for one slide!

# Publication

Happell, B., Waks, S., Bocking, J., Horgan, A., Greaney, S., Goodwin, J., Scholz, B., Van der Vaart, K. J., Allon, J., Hals, E., Granerud, A., Doody, R., MacGabhann, L., Russell, S., Griffin, M., Lahti, M., Ellila, H., Pulli, J., Vatula, A., Platania - Phung, C., Bjornnson, E., & Biering, P. (2019). "I felt some prejudice in the back of my head": Nursing students' perspective on learning about mental health from 'Experts by Experience'. . *Journal of Psychiatric & Mental Health Nursing*, 26, 233-243.



# THANK YOU!

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