Mental Health Nursing Leadership…Time to refocus?

Rachael Aitchison
Waikato District Health Board

Mental health nursing leadership in New Zealand is not immune from the impacts of the increased expectations in the healthcare system. Never before have changes in the socio-political context outside of health had such dramatic effects on what is expected from the health dollar and what is expected by consumers of health services.

With this changing context more is required of nurse leaders and the skill set which once brought nurses into leadership roles has expanded at an exponential rate. Nurses in leadership roles need to be adaptable, innovative, and capable agents for change. A shift is occurring which sees nurse leaders as champions for change, exemplars of transformational leaders, and embracers of recovery and service user involvement. Growing both the capacity and capability of nurses to be these new leaders and for nurses themselves to see their future in nurse leadership, is a challenge which requires a new focus, if nurses are to prevent the erosion of leadership capability from their tool kit.

Accepting the status quo that nurses are the only option for leadership roles, leaves nursing vulnerable and exposed. Nursing needs to demonstrate it has the right skill set, values and attitude to be leading teams and services which meet the needs of services users in a contemporary and adaptive health system.

This presentation seeks to explore the challenges facing nursing leadership, understand the opportunities for development and provoke reflection about what has gone wrong and what is working well. From new graduate to experienced nurse, this presentation will challenge why participants consider nurses to be effective leaders, what has to happen to sustain nurses as leaders and why the partnership between service users and their families is critical to creating nursing leaders of the future.