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Social work in the emergency department-implementation of a domestic and family violence screening program

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Women who have experienced domestic and family violence use health services more frequently than women who have not. Early identification and intervention by the health system may reduce health problems associated with domestic and family violence and lead to saving for the health sector. This study aimed to evaluate the impact of a new domestic and family violence screening program, which was based on an ecological model and introduced by a social work team in the Emergency Department of a major metropolitan hospital. The evaluation method included an audit of social work case files to access the effect on referral rates and a survey of Emergency Department staff to obtain perceptions of the impact of the program on the staff and clients. In the 3 month period following the introduction of the program, the rate of referral to social work increased by 213%. Staff agreed that the Emergency Department is an appropriate place to ask about domestic and family violence, under certain conditions. Findings suggest that an ecological social work model provides an approach to screening for domestic and family violence that not only contributes to increased identification and supportive client interventions but may also contribute to more sustainable systemic change.

Biography

Debbie McCarthy completed the Bachelor of Social Work in year 2000, prior to this she was an enrolled nurse for 15yrs, during this period working in residential care facilities, palliative care and a brain injury unit. As a social worker she has been employed as a counselor for Human Services Task Force in tissue retention, has worked in various inpatient wards. She has worked as the Flinders Medical Centre Emergency Department Social Work Team Coordinator for 12yrs, having extensive experience in crisis intervention and trauma counseling; she has also designed a number of resources for consumers and staff. She established a training program for staff in the Emergency Department and Post-graduate nursing program and has been a guest speaker at various workshops in Adelaide. She is on a state-wide advisory group regarding domestic violence for education and clinical procedures. She has recently won the Excellence in Allied Health Award for the Southern Adelaide Local Health Network for her work in domestic violence.

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