

## Mental Health Nursing Training in Zimbabwe

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### Introduction

The training of Mental Health nursing practitioners is critical in developing countries [1] especially Zimbabwe. This is because there is a critical shortage of Psychiatrists which has resulted in task shifting. The mental health nurse therefore carries the biggest part of the service provision [2] in mental health services. A mini review of some relevant documents and articles was carried out to support this paper.

### Structure of Training

In Zimbabwe, nurses have traditionally been trained by the Ministry of Health and Child Care at Government, Private and Mission hospitals. The Ministry of Higher education trains nurses at tertiary educational institutions. The Ministry of Health and Child Care train's general nurses for three years who are awarded a Diploma in general nursing and these are called registered general nurses. The majority of nurses in Zimbabwe are registered general nurses. The Diploma in General nursing has 37 h of theoretical input on Mental Health Nursing and 6 weeks of clinical attachment in a psychiatric ward. The government has also adopted the training of Primary Care Nurses through an 18 months intense program in which Mental Health training is done over 8 h of theoretical input with no clinical attachment.

The Ministry of Higher Education through the University of Zimbabwe started offering a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) [3] degree in Nursing in 1998. The degree is a four year programme. The Bachelor of Sciences (B.Sc.) degree in nursing has 48 h of theoretical input in Mental Health Nursing and 6 weeks of clinical attachment on a psychiatric ward. University of Zimbabwe also offers the Master of Science in nursing degree with majors in psychiatry, midwifery and medical surgical nursing. Other tertiary educational institutions that offer undergraduate degree programs for nurses include Africa University, Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe Open University and Chinhoyi University of Technology.

Ingutsheni Psychiatric Hospital offers a 3 year generic Diploma in Mental Health Nursing and an 18 months post-basic Diploma in Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing which is done after acquiring the 3 year basic Diploma in General Nursing. Currently, it is the only hospital offering training in a mental health nursing Diploma.

### Challenges

The B.Sc. nursing qualified personnel have not been accommodated in the hierarchy of the government nursing structure. For that reason,

when they qualify in clinical settings, they are remunerated the same as the diploma qualified nurses. This has resulted in a limited number of B.Sc. qualified nurses being recruited and retained in psychiatric clinical practice resulting in a low uptake in the Masters of Science in psychiatric nursing. A Registered general Nurse with a diploma in mental health cannot be enrolled into the Master's degree in Psychiatric Nursing programme directly as there is no bridging course between the Diploma programme and the Master's degree programme. This has resulted in a low uptake of the Masters in Psychiatric nursing programme because after completing a 3 years general nursing Diploma and 18 months post graduate diploma in mental health nursing, they still have to do another 4 years in B.Sc. nursing to enrol for the Master's program. This forms a gap in the training of future leaders in Mental Health Nursing and Psychiatry Services.

### Way Forward

It is critical to introduce a bridging course [4] where a registered nurse can do selected modules that will fill in the gaps between the 18 months post graduate Diploma in mental health nursing and the B.Sc. nursing programme so that they can be upgraded to a Bachelor of Science. A model to bridge the gap that can be adopted is one that is used at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland where a 18 months program is available to convert the diploma in nursing into a B.Sc. psychiatric nursing degree. In Cape Town there is a 12 months program that offers modules that will enable a psychiatric nurse to hold a B.Sc. nursing degree after completing the programme. An alternative solution is to encourage the B.Sc. nursing graduates to take up a career path in Clinical Mental Health Nursing, so that after appropriate experience they may consider doing the Master's degree in Psychiatric nursing. This will ensure the on-going training of future leaders in the Zimbabwe Mental Health Services.

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