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MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICE: WHO MAKES THE TEAM?

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Mental health practice in Australia is constructed around interprofessional teams. Significant changes in the past forty years have seen transition in mental health from large institutions to community-based services in which discipline specific and generic skills are blended. National practice standards, developed for the mental health workforce, set the scope for interprofessional team practice. Two of these national standards relate to participation and partnerships, within teams, between services, and with consumers and carers. While clear in their intent, these standards do pose challenges to traditional practice models and raise issues of power and politics. This paper presents a study that addresses these challenges and considers issues related to education of professions who work within community-based psychosocial rehabilitation services.

The first part of the study, using hermeneutic analysis, considered historical perspectives of professional practice knowledge within mental health services, beginning with the psychiatric hospitals of convict Australia. Hermeneutics involves the interpretation of existing and constructed texts. Texts in this study comprised: health and public records, professional archives, and textbooks, particularly those with historical editions. Interviews with practitioners provided personal accounts of practice. Secondly, the study explored the nature of participation in a community-based psychosocial rehabilitation program, from the perspectives of participants within the program.

Together, the two components of the study sought to challenge current perspectives of interprofessional practice and to address questions related to professional practice knowledge. Are we achieving the aims of mental health rehabilitation? Are we working across conflicting models of practice? How do we facilitate a mix of knowledge and skills in new generations of health professionals to prepare them for practice that involves potential conflict between recovery and evidence-based approaches?

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Lynne Adamson is course coordinator, Bachelor of Occupational Therapy at Deakin University in Geelong, where interprofessional learning is a focus for health students. Lynne is interested in the challenge of developing strong discipline knowledge and skills as well as effective interprofessional relationships. Her focus for this paper is drawn from research related to community based psychosocial rehabilitation programs where traditional professional learning is challenged further by the goal of meaningful client participation in services.