MEDIA RELEASE

Mental health nursing guru to talk Safewards at international nursing conference

UK mental health nurse Professor Len Bowers wants to make inpatient mental health wards safer – for both clients and staff.

Since 2010, Professor Bowers and his team have been investigating ways to reduce conflict (such as violence, absconding, substance use, rule breaking and medication refusal) and containment (coerced sedation, seclusion, manual restraint etc) in inpatient mental health settings.

While people with mental illness are more likely to be the victims of violence than the perpetrators of violence, reducing conflict and containment are important matters in every health care setting.

The Safewards model identifies a range of interventions staff can use to make a difference to the atmosphere of the ward, including involving carers or family members, providing alternatives, being respectful and reassuring, and using de-escalation techniques.

While Professor Bowers and his team acknowledge that there is no single answer to reducing conflict and containment, services that have adopted the Safewards model have seen conflict decrease by 14.6% and containment activities decrease by 23.6%.

To date, half of all mental health hospitals in England have made a commitment to implement the Safewards model, as has the state of Victoria here in Australia.

Professor Bowers is currently in Australia to discuss the Safewards model, the evidence behind it and why it is so popular, at the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses’ 40th International Mental Health Nursing Conference, being held in Melbourne from 7-9 October.

Over 600 mental health nurses and others working in mental health are attending the Conference, which is an opportunity for participants to stay up to date on trends in clinical practice, research, education and explore the changing scope of mental health nursing.

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