

Multidisciplinary Management Approach in Mental Health: Role of Psychiatric Nurses

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Mental illnesses have enormous impact on the psychological and physical wellbeing of the individuals affected as well as on their families and the society. Management of mental illnesses is of utmost importance and is often a challenge. Since time immemorial, patients with mental illnesses are seen differently, treated badly and highly stigmatized as mental illness is perceived as an enigma (unknown cause, unpredictable course & outcome).

The history of mental health treatment is centuries old. The approaches of management of mental illnesses have been evolved with time. For a quite long time, the approaches followed were experiential ones and only recently, the focus is shifting towards the evidence based approaches.

Multidisciplinary approach is a noble management approach, which blends multiple disciplines in a single platform to achieve a holistic therapeutic goal [12]. Multidisciplinary approach in mental illnesses is required for several reasons like:

- Multiple needs of the clients
- Provision of more focused care
- Exercising the skills on the area of expertise
- To provide a holistic care
- Commonness of physical co-morbidities with mental illnesses

In a multidisciplinary team, each team member has a defined role, but due to some contextual factors there occurs blurring of the individual roles which always remains a challenge [1]. For example – in the management of psychosexual disorders or evaluation

of a victim with sexual assault, the patients often face difficulty in discussing the issues with opposite gender. In such cases, to respect the privacy and comfortability of the client, one of the members of the team, who may not be expert enough to deal with a specific issue, may have to go beyond the expected role. Mental health nurses, sometimes play pivotal roles in such crisis situations.

Studies suggest that integrated and multidisciplinary approach is more effective than conventional approach in conditions like – substance use disorders with co-morbidity [2], dementia & other cognitive disorders [4, 5], functional gastrointestinal disorders [3], severe somatoform disorder [6], psychiatric disorders associated with pregnancy [7], mood disorders [8]. Multidisciplinary approach is also essential for continuity of care as well as minimizing the gap between physical and mental wellbeing [9, 10]. Continuity of care includes – continuity of information, management and therapeutic relationship [10]. Psychiatric disorders need long term treatment; hence continuity of care is highly essential which need to be maintained by the nurse.

Nurses have an important role in providing care for both mental as well as physical health [10]. Nurses can effectively provide general health care, health education, information about healthy life styles. Assessment and monitoring is an integral part of mental health. Nurses play an important role in assessment of general condition, ward behavior, mental status examination, monitoring of general as well as mental health, monitoring of side effects etc. As per the Mental Health Atlas, 2011 released by World Health Organization (WHO), mental health section, approximately 30 countries (mostly underdeveloped) face severe scarcity of manpower in mental health, as a result of which, nurses used to

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prescribe medications [11]. In resource scarce settings, nurses have to handle added responsibilities and imagining about multidisciplinary approach for psychiatric care is a dream.

Community mental health is an important emerging mental health service. Mental health nurse has an important role in community mental health services. In India, national mental health program (NMHP) is running for more than three decades. Under NMHP, several districts of different states of India, multidisciplinary teams are working at the community level. Mental health nurses have to play multiple roles, where there is scarcity of other mental health professionals. Similarly, mental health nurses working with intravenous drug users and other substance use disorders have to dispense drugs, counsel patients and monitor general health conditions of patients as well as coordinating with physicians for the holistic care of the patients.

Multidisciplinary approach gives a learning experience. All members of the multidisciplinary team learn from each other, which helps them in providing holistic care. An experience of working in a multidisciplinary team increases the confidence as well as competence.

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