Improving Mental Health Literacy in a General Hospital Setting: the role of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)

Dr Jenny Kelly
School of Public Health & Tropical Medicine
James Cook University

Lesley Higgs
Institute of Mental Health, Townsville Health Service District
Outline of Presentation

- Introduction to Barwon Health
- Project Rationale (Why)
- Overview of MHFA (What)
- Implementation Stage (How)
- Outcomes and Lessons Learnt
Barwon Health

• Located in Geelong
• Victoria’s largest regional hospital
• 921 beds
• 18 community sites
• 5000 + staff.
Regional Divisions
Women’s Services

• Maternity care including community-based clinics, domiciliary care and a breastfeeding service

• 1987 births in 2009

• Children’s Services provide hospital, home & community-based care for babies and children with complex needs.
Project Background

• In 2004 DHS funded a 12 month PND Early Intervention Project

• Low level of mental health literacy amongst midwives and other non mental health staff

• 12 hour MHFA course as a means of addressing this issue.
It is estimated that 15-25% of women will develop a significant mental health problem between conception and 12 months postnatally.

Source: Priest et al. 2005
Maternal Deaths in Australia

• 211 maternal deaths classified as directly or indirectly related to pregnancy between 1997-2005

• Psychiatric illness was the third leading cause of all maternal deaths (11% deaths).

Source: Sullivan et al. 2007
Psychiatric Causes of Death

• 7 out of 10 deaths - suicide

• 5 suicides prior to birth (7 – 28 weeks)

• 2 suicides after birth

• 2 drug related deaths

• 1 pedestrian in motor vehicle accident.
What is MHFA?

- 12-hour training course developed to address the low level of mental health literacy in the community

- Explains the symptoms, causes and evidence-based treatments for:
  - depression
  - anxiety disorders
  - psychosis
  - substance misuse.
Figure 1: Spectrum of mental health interventions from wellness to mental disorders and through to recovery, showing the contribution of MHFA
Course overview

SESSION 1 (3 hours)

+ Why Mental Health First Aid?
+ The Action Plan for Mental Health First Aid
+ Common Mental Health Problems
+ What is Depression?
+ Symptoms & Causes of Depression

SESSION 2 (3 hours)

+ Crisis First Aid for Suicidal Behaviour
+ Treatment and Resources for Depression
+ What are Anxiety Disorders?
+ Symptoms & Causes of Anxiety Disorders
SESSION 3 (3 hours)

- Crisis First Aid for Panic Attacks
- Crisis First Aid for Acute Stress Reaction
- Treatment & Resources for Anxiety Disorders
- What are Psychotic Disorders?
- Symptoms & Causes of Psychotic Disorders

SESSION 4 (3 hours)

- Crisis First Aid for Acute Psychosis
- Treatment & Resources for Psychosis
- What is Substance Use Disorder?
- Symptoms, Causes, Treatment & Resources
- Crisis First Aid for Overdose
MHFA Action Plan

1. Assess Risk of Suicide or Harm
2. Listen Non-judgmentally
3. Give Reassurance and Information
4. Encourage Person to Get Appropriate Professional Help
5. Encourage Self-help Strategies
Planning & Implementation

• Consultation with mental health service

• Contacted MHFA course author

• Project proposal was written

• Proposal plan presented at Executive meeting

• Approval granted to conduct a pilot and evaluate.
MHFA in the Hospital

- Introduced to midwives and paediatric nurses at Geelong Hospital in 2004
- Since 2004, 32 courses > 400 nurses/midwives
- All courses have input from local mental health service.
Who did MHFA?

- Midwives and Paediatric nurses
- ICU Nurses
- ED Nurses
- Aged Care Nurses
- Community Health Nurses
- Maternal and Child Health Nurses
- Allied Health staff.
Lessons Learnt

- Partnership with mental health service essential
- Management must see the value of the course
- Need to research well before implementation
- Facilitators with commitment to improving health outcomes for clients and their families essential
- Preference for two full days of training
- Need to keep course cost affordable.
Course Outcomes

• Greater understanding of the need to enquire about mental health during pregnancy

• Increased awareness of signs and symptoms of mental health problems

• Increased knowledge of local mental health services and referral pathways.
Course Outcomes (con’t)

• Greater confidence in initiating a discussion about mental health and wellbeing

• More appropriate referrals to the PND support worker

• MHFA became a priority for new women’s and children’s services midwifery & nursing staff.
Summary

• MHFA is an evidence-based course that improves mental health literacy

• Collaboration between mental health and the acute hospital sector leads to improvements in health outcomes for clients, their families and staff

• MHFA could be introduced with similar benefits to general hospitals throughout Queensland and beyond.
Further Information

• www.mhfa.com.au

• jenny.kelly@jcu.edu.au

• lesley_higgs@health.qld.gov.au
Questions?