

YARNING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH ABORIGINAL MENTAL HEALTH WORK PRACTICE

Approaches to Aboriginal mental health issues - while of the utmost importance in their own right - seem to greatly mirror the concerns of all Australians who want to receive individualized and culturally competent mental health care that promotes both recovery and social inclusion.

On 11 July, a one day forum, "Yarning about Mental Health", was convened by MHCC, in partnership with Parramatta Mission, for community-based mental health service providers in NSW. The presentation was delivered by representatives from the Menzies School of Health Research who have been conducting an Australian Integrated Mental Health Initiative (AIMHI) project in the Northern Territory that aims to improve the mental health outcomes of rural Indigenous people.

The day was facilitated by three Indigenous mental health workers and a non-Indigenous psychiatrist, Dr Tricia Nagel, who has been working with Aboriginal populations for more than 20 years. The similarities and differences in the needs and wants of both the "top end" and other Indigenous groups – both rural and urban - were explored throughout the day in what became an increasingly valuable and informative exchange.

A feature of the day was the sharing of the pictorial "*Mental Health Stay Strong Care Plan Package*". This is a brief motivational interviewing approach to care planning with Indigenous Australians – from initial problem assessment through to goal setting and review – that is structured, sensitive and flexible to the needs of both people affected by mental health problems and mental health service providers.

Many aspects of Indigenous mental health care were explored on the day and these included:

- Consideration of both current and historical cultural issues in mental health service delivery.
- Aspects of Aboriginal life and culture that can help people with mental health problems "stay strong"
- The importance of care that targets communities and wellness;
- A greater reliance on verbal and visual approaches to care planning and review; and,
- Numerous statistics related to indigenous mental health.

More information about this approach including purchase of care planning resources can be obtained from www.menzies.edu.au or Ph 08 8922 8196

The MHCC has been listening to community organisations working for mental health who want to better address the needs of Indigenous Australians with mental health problems. Some have suggested value in convening future forums that bring together Indigenous mental health workers only to strengthen culturally competent approaches. We believe that much work is ahead of us all in this important area and would be interested to hear more from you about how to prioritise approaches?

QUESTIONS TO ASK

What keeps us strong?

What makes us sick?

What are we like when we are sick?

What gets us well again?

WHAT TO DO

Talk to someone

Do more of what is working (to help keep you strong)

Do less of what's not working

Then, if the problem is still not solved, seek professional help and treatment