

# Better Skills, Best Care

## Workforce design strategy

### Psychiatric Service Officers (PSO) Pilot

#### What are the workforce issues in mental health?

A departmental workforce study and demand data (2003) highlighted a number of workforce challenges in Victoria's clinical mental health services. The study predicted that staff and service demand issues are likely to worsen over the next 10 years. The study identified three main challenges:

1. Direct care mental health workers appear to be quite mobile, particularly among younger staff in some occupational groups.
2. If the current trends in service growth and staff mobility continue, annual recruitment requirements are likely to increase.
3. There is poor spread of the workforce in relation to the spread of the client population across the state. Better planning is needed to ensure that staff distribution, composition and skill-base respond to community and service system needs.

#### How is the DHS responding to the mental health workforce issues?

The DHS has implemented strategies to assist mental health workforce growth, including:

- Three education and training partnerships (clusters) have been developed to improve the access to, and the quality of training and professional development for mental health staff.
- A mental health orientation manual has been developed in partnership with services and is currently under review for release in 2006.
- Increased access to professional development support for nurses - such as post graduate scholarships and enhanced access to study leave.
- Support for projects exploring the role of PSEN's in medication administration and community settings.
- Introduction of a graduate program for new nursing and allied health staff.
- Introduction of Nurse Practitioners to the mental health sector.
- Inclusion of a focus on mental health support roles in the Better Skills, Best Care (BSBC) workforce design strategy (see below).

#### What is the *Better Skills, Best Care* strategy?

Ensuring a sufficient supply of suitably qualified and distributed staff across the Victorian health system is essential to achieving long term system sustainability and viability and ensuring service quality and safety. While strategies are in place to increase the number of health care workers, there is also a need to explore how services can make best use of the current workforce. In relation to mental health, the BSBC workforce design strategy aims to better match staff skills with patient needs in a way that helps meet service demand, keep services sustainable and improves the patient experience.

The BSBC strategy is funding and supporting a diverse range of pilots across different health settings to explore these issues with specific occupational groups and services.

## What is the BSBC PSO pilot?

To date, little attention has been given to the development and strengthening of PSO roles. Currently, career and educational pathways for PSOs are limited and little is known about the ways that PSOs work in their roles in different settings.

The BSBC PSO pilot will research existing PSO roles (as defined within the classification standards of the Victorian Psychiatric Services Certified Agreement 2004-2007) and examine what opportunities exist to better support and enhance roles within that framework.

Three services, Goulburn Valley, Southern Health and Forensicare, will participate in this research pilot and provide advice to the Department about:

1. Current activities and tasks undertaken by PSOs.
2. Additional activities that could be undertaken by PSOs within their existing scope of practice.
3. Identification of tasks and competencies required for PSO roles and the education and training required to support the role.
4. Cultural and practical barriers to supporting the role of PSOs within mental health services and recommended strategies to address them.

DHS has appointed a consultant to coordinate the pilot activities and report. The consultant will visit the three services to collect information and speak with stakeholders such as PSOs, other mental health workers, managers, consumers and carers. Workshops will be held in each service to discuss PSO roles and generate the final report for the Department.

## How do I get more information?

Information about the overall strategy is available on the Department's website at <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/pdpd/workforce/workforcedesign.htm>.

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