

User Involvement in Mental Health Care Teaching

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The emerging evidence-base for recovery-orientation includes the urgent call for a partnership approach to psychiatric practice, service developments, research and education. The role of the lived experience in teaching is an essential component of initiatives aimed at implementing recovery-orientation.

User involvement in teaching mental health professionals has become a common feature of mental health training curricula in English speaking countries. Data indicate that this form of teaching is feasible and acceptable to both teachers with and without a lived experience and to students of different professional backgrounds. Current research however mostly concerns trainings of mental health nurses. Types of user involvement vary considerably from an active role in the development of curricula and training materials as well as teaching to more passive and collaborative approaches. Published data mainly focus on students' response showing beneficial outcomes, such as attitudinal changes, reduced anxiety and increased confidence in communicating with patients as well as insight into users' experience of services and needs for improvement. Only few studies highlight the perspective of the users as teachers with more positive, e.g. empowerment, than negative experiences, e.g. voyeurism. Clear expectations and specific training and supervision have been identified by educators as conducive factors, while tokenistic and unprepared inputs lead to problematic situations. Further research needs to define adequate outcome measurements for different contexts and subjects under study as well as methods that are able to address multiple perspectives as well as long-term effects.