

# Educational issues

## Educational opportunities for deaf people

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Opportunities for deaf people to access nurse education should be enhanced by the work of a small working group. The English National Board, together with representatives from the three National Centres for Mental Health and Deafness, and services for deaf people within the independent sector, are meeting to promote opportunities for deaf people to access pre-registration nurse education.

The group's work has already identified that many education and service providers have a misconception that there is policy which prevents deaf people from accessing nurse education. This is not the case: the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, was introduced with the aim of ensuring that people with a disability were not treated less favourably than others.

The Act states that a disabled person must not be discriminated against in relation to recruitment and retention practices and it is a positive expectation that reasonable changes will be made to premises or employment arrangements to meet the requirements of disabled people. Educational support services for deaf people in some universities and technological advances that are available in modern health care suggest that deafness alone should not be a satisfactory reason for denying a person access to a pre-registration nursing course.

Three years ago the Board supported a scheme at the University of Sheffield to give deaf people access to the pre-registration mental health nursing programme. Unfortunately the university was unable to attract Education and Training Consortia funding to provide the necessary extra support.

The national centres for mental health and deafness support the Sheffield initiative and claim that if deaf people were able to gain registered mental health nursing qualifications, they would be delighted to recruit them to fill the majority of their posts with deaf employees.

Dr. Nick Kitson, Clinical Director of the National Deaf Services, Pathfinder Mental Health Trust, state at the European Society for Mental Health and Deaf Conference some of the reasons found to be important through experiences within this service because deaf people:

- through a lifetime experience, have greater natural flexibility in their use of visual and tactile communication and in changing roles which enable them to be much better communicators with deaf people.

- have the advantage of continuing personal experience of deafness and greater credibility with deaf clients or patients and skills can be used to form specific deaf therapy groups concentrating on deaf ways, and deaf culture
- in professional roles, as well as by their social lives, provide appropriate role models to patients, particularly those with low self esteem which they attribute to their deafness
- have experiences which demystifies mental health issues and reduces the stigma associated with mental health institutions within the deaf community
- are natural experts and judges of environmental and technological issues and keep their hearing colleagues up to date

The group wants to influence Education and Training Consortia which are geographically associated with the national centres to release extra funding which would enable education providers to support arrangements for a small group of deaf people to access the existing pre-registration mental health nursing programme.

If you would like more information about this important initiative, contact;

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Note: The ENB ceased to exist 2002 and Peter McAndrew is in a new post. The Newsletter *ENB News* is no longer published.

Contact can still be made with Naomi Sharples, at [Salford University: mailto:n.sharples@salford.ac.uk](mailto:n.sharples@salford.ac.uk)