

British Society for Mental Health and Deafness

Progress through equality

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Issues arising from a proposal for deaf persons to have access to nurse education

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Introduction

This presentation is based on a proposal to the English National Board of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (ENB) as part of a College of Nursing and Midwifery and specialist psychiatric nursing services seeking to establish an integrated nurse training programme for deaf persons with the intention of them becoming Registered Mental Nurses.

Practical problems in relation to communication between deaf students and hearing (non-sign language users) professionals are dealt with, as are issues of placements and achieving competencies.

Multidisciplinary team

Within these specialist units there are a number of deaf professionals working within the multidisciplinary team including teachers, psychologists, counsellors and social workers. Nursing members of the team consist of professionals who are hearing and unqualified individuals (deaf or hearing) who work as Health Care Assistants (HCAs).

The need for deaf nurses

The need for deaf nurses with specialist skills is crucial to the ongoing development of these units. Amongst the deaf professionals within the units at this time there are no deaf nurses. If the units are to provide adequate care for their client group, both within the units themselves, the community and other related services, it is necessary to provide deaf people with access to nurse education.

Given the complexity of caring for deaf people whose first or preferred language is BSL, this project is seen as a part of the commitment to equal opportunities for deaf clients leading to an improvement of the quality of care that is available. The specialist skills in communicating with deaf people at an appropriate level of understanding, knowledge of culture and the psychosocial aspects of deafness can only be found in people who are themselves deaf.

Entry into nurse education for deaf people

Currently, entry into nurse education is limited to hearing people, although it is acknowledged that some people with slight hearing impairment do enter nurse education and some remain employed

as nurses on becoming deaf after qualification. Deaf people are clearly disadvantaged compared to their hearing colleagues.

The role of the Deaf Professionals in Mental Health

the Deaf Professionals in Mental Health have held a number of meetings to discuss the issues of deaf peoples' access to nurse education with a view to:

- Equal professional status with hearing nurses within the psychiatric unites for deaf people.
- A career structure that is currently unavailable.
- Providing professionals within health care that are from the same linguistic and cultural background as the majority of the client group.
- Future access to other health care professions.

Sheffield & North Trent College of Nursing and Midwifery's (SNTC's) role

The proposal indicates the means by which deaf people can gain access to nurse education, through partnership, in a way which will provide both deaf and hearing students on the same course with a wide range of rich life experiences, which will provide positive gains for both hearing and deaf people. Practical issues in relation to communication between deaf and hearing students and hearing (non-sign language users) professionals are dealt with, as are issues of placements and achieving competencies.

The proposal meets the SNTCs organisational policy of equal opportunities and educating individuals to provide health care within a changing multi-cultural society.

An initial proposal to the ENB (the body responsible for nurse training and membership in England), to seek permission for deaf persons to have access to the programmes was not accepted. Following further consideration it was agreed that work could be undertaken to develop a course proposal without any commitment to it being approved. At this stage it is worth noting that access to nurse education is governed by legislation and accompanying regulations which may vary from time to time.

As a result, an approach was made to the Principle of the College to seek permission to forward the proposal. This was granted and proceeded under the direction of the Director of Academic Affairs.

The three specialist units have all been involved in the formation of the proposal and it is through their commitment and the strength of that commitment that we have been able to go this far.

Many of the Patient's Charter Standards are central to the provision of health services for deaf people. The Patient's Charter notes that citizens have existing rights *'to be given a clear explanation of any treatment proposed, including any risks and any alternatives, before you decide whether you will agree to the treatment'*, which must revolve around some form of communication. Some of the National Charter Standards centre on specific issues, such as 'cultural beliefs' and 'information to friends and relatives'. Recognising the culture of deaf people is more than just providing interpreter services; communication is central to the provision of information.

This is not a unique picture, in that English people are often not seen as being able to speak other languages such as French, but rely on the French person to learn English; in the same vein, there is little wonder that not much attempt is made overall for people to learn the language of deaf people.

The benefits would be enormous to the course in that there would be cultural enrichment, both with and from other course participants, giving an overall enhancement to the profession as a whole.

Joe Kellet: From a personal view point, during my time working with this proposal, I have noticed a change in people from giving me umpteen reasons why deaf people cannot enter nurse training, such as “they cannot use a stethoscope”, to “that sounds a great idea, lets see if we can make it work”. I have also been surprised at the number of students and fellow health professionals who have relatives with hearing problems, including deafness.

Currently, the proposal has gone to the ENB offices in York and from this we will be looking to set our time scale for the first entries to the course. This will include some selectivity of trying to take those who are most ready to undertake the course first, and setting a programme of preparation for the remainder.

Some of the issues we have identified relate to:

Funding There is a need to seek additional funding beyond the students’ bursary to reflect the inclusion of interpreters, adapting audio vision aids and changes within teaching accommodation e.g. telephones.

Educational Qualifications

Currently, this is still the equivalent of five ‘O’ levels or similar on a points system, but there are acceptable alternative qualifications which vary from time to time.

Teaching Teachers need to be aware of these differences and this in itself requires some teachers to have a basic understanding and working knowledge of working with deaf persons.

In addition to the usual teacher/student interactions, there is also a need for the teachers and students to appreciate the different group interactions which may occur.

Placements There is a wide variety of placements available for the first students spread over a large geographical area.

An excellent communication network is essential.

Attitudes It is the attitudes within nursing which may need to be changed most.

SNTC Teaching Staff

A named tutor will be identified within the College to take responsibility for this group of students.

A number of tutors will also be required to use sign language and will need preparation for this. Deaf awareness training will be essential.

The named tutor will link with the three educational establishments attached to the specialist units.

Teaching and office accommodation

It is proposed that the theoretical component of the programme will be delivered in Sheffield.

Classrooms will be as for other courses but will be adapted for the needs of deaf individuals.

Individual needs of the students will vary. The following will be available:

- text telephone systems
- audio-visual material adapted to the deaf individual's needs
- fire alarms adapted (in line with health and safety requirements)
- paging systems

Programme delivery

Distance learning and distance support will be identified to support the students in practice settings. The majority of the practical experience will take place within the specialist units and their localities. A range of placements in other areas, such as the community, residential homes, rehabilitation units and 'special needs schools are envisaged. Each of the units and SNTC are negotiating such placements.

There will be an expectation for students to be placed in all three specialist units, so that they get a wider experience of the services available and approaches to care they adopt.

Issues related to the specialist units

Resources All the three specialist units have links with universities and higher educational establishments, local nursing colleges and libraries. Information technology is a feature of the units operation and educational programmes.

The units provide a variety of facilities for their clients, both within the units themselves and within the local communities.

All three units already take (hearing) student nurses and are audited through the local nursing colleges.

These links provide a number of training courses for staff and some include access and NVQ courses for deaf people which will assist in the preparation of those individuals who wish to enter the programme but do not yet have the appropriate entry qualifications.

Student residencies

The London and Birmingham units have residencies that students can access. The Manchester unit does not have student residencies, but other local residential facilities may be available.

Links with the voluntary sector

All the units have strong links with the voluntary sector, including SIGN, RNID, BDA, NDCS and Hearing Concern, as well as a number of local organisations. The links with the voluntary sector may also be a source of student placement.

This proposal will bring nurse education and nursing forward towards equal opportunities and offer a linguistic group an appropriate professional qualification that will further improve the nursing care that is available to deaf people.

Further reading:

Denmark J 1966 **Mental illness and early profound deafness** *British Journal of Medical Physiology* 33, 117-24.

Denmark J 1985 **A study of 250 patients referred to a department of psychiatry for the deaf** *Journal of Psychiatry* 146 282-6.

Wright DJ 1992 **Seeing the signs: Health provision for deaf people and its significance to the RGN** Unpublished dissertation, Sheffield Hallam University.

Wright DJ 1992 **Perceptions of deafness** *Nursing Times* 88(51) 39-41.