Ms Judye MARGETTS
North Balwyn Psychology Clinic

Mastering Interaction: New Directions for Consumers, Carers and Mental Health Professionals

Abstract:
This paper presents initial findings of a new model of care that encourages the rehabilitation of relationships between carers, families and consumers of mental health services. Many models of care have been implemented to enable service providers to achieve better outcomes for the consumer. However, many carers continue to feel pathologised by the system that cares for their family member. Improving health outcomes and services for carers needs to be as important as improving health outcomes and services for consumers.

This paper presents a new model, which is based on research conducted in the trauma and family therapy fields over the past decade. This model allows service providers to improve their services to carers by reconsidering the impact and possibilities of maximizing the health outcomes for the carer and the consumer who experiences mental illness. Specifically, this model uses a triadic/systems approach, which gives the carer and consumer an effective means of reformulating their relationships. Subtleties in the treatment provided to consumers of mental health services and the service provided to their carers are contrasted and highlighted. Initial statistical support has emerged into the improved emotional health and relationships for the carer and consumer following the implementation of this model.

While a stable definition of this new model continues to evolve, the core theoretical tenets underpinning this approach have remained central to the model for over 10 years. The new model has provided an approach that enables carers and consumers to effectively restructure, and manage, both crisis and remission periods of the mental illness, resulting in better health outcomes for both. This paper presents the model, discusses the theoretical tenets, presents statistics from carers and consumers of mental health services, and case exemplars of the approach. Limitations of the approach are considered along with future recommendations for research.