Service Priorities and Programmes

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An Exploratory Study on the Needs and Expectations of Psychiatric Patients with Repeated Admissions; Their Family Carers and Health Care Professionals

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Introduction

Re-hospitalization is common and costly. However “Costly” is not just simply referring to monetary perspective. A patient who experiences frequent re-admissions has various socio-economic impacts to his/her normal life with particularly great influence on his/her family network system. Therefore, maintaining a successful and stable community living with reduced number of readmission for a psychiatric patient is highly valuable to all stakeholders. It also becomes one of the ultimate goals for the mental health professionals. Many literatures have discussed the risk factors and effective interventions of psychiatric re-hospitalization. However, there are few studies on the phenomenon of our local psychiatric patients as well as different perspectives on the needs and expectations of our patients, their family carers and mental health professionals in sustaining their mental health well-being in the community.

Objectives

1. To identify the facilitators and barriers in community re-integration; 2. To understand the challenges encountered subsequent to each discharge; & 3. To explore views on improving the current services in supporting the psychiatric patients in community re-integration.

Methodology

Purposive sampling was used as it enables the identification of specific groups of people to provide relevant information. Patients who are diagnosed with any kind of mental illness with more than two episodes of readmission to the psychiatric wards within the period from June 2012 to June 2013; and mentally competent at the time of recruitment are eligible to this study. The main approach of this study is based on

focus groups interview. A semi-structured interview guides were developed. Investigators were provided training to acquire the basic skills on becoming a facilitator in the focus group. Each interview was conducted by two facilitators. Three types of focus group were formed: (1) patients, (2) their family carers and (3) mental health professionals. Grouping participants of the same type in order to promoting a more comfortable discussion on the topics was arranged. For the family carers group, family members of those patients who participated in this study are their main caregivers after discharge. For the health professionals group, the inclusion criteria are health professionals of community psychiatric service in Hong Kong East Cluster in the past 12 months regardless of their serving disciplines. They need to have taken less than 60 days of leave in this serving period.

Result

A total of 68 participants were recruited including 22 patients, 34 carers and 12 mental health professionals. There were 7 focus group interviews conducted. During the focus group discussions, the views of the local service users and service providers on the facilitators and barriers; the challenges faced and the current supportive services in community re-integration have been identified. Unemployment, stigma of the mental illness, persisting side effect of the drugs and limited social life are the common challenges mentioned by the three parties i.e. patients, carers and the mental health professionals. The patients expressed lots of difficulties in developing friendship with other normal people. Moreover, they believed that stable employment was a significant symbol of illness recovery and signature of usefulness. They would expect to increase more choice of job nature; realistic and practical vocational training with enhancement on promotional strategies to employ more mental patients. On the other hand, many carers revealed that they had experienced mental relaxation in the period of psychiatric admission of the patients; however, they had very vague ideas and understanding on the recovery plan of them. Furthermore, they suggested some areas of knowledge and skill enhancement with support group should be considered for them. Some service users expressed the point that instead of giving lots of organization names with contact telephone numbers, it would be better to understand the ultimate needs of them and introduce more concrete information of the most appropriate supportive service. Regarding to the facilitators for successful integration in community, similar points were shared in both service users and providers. Health care professionals emphasized the importance of emotional support and positive mindset for the frontline staff of various disciplines. The identification of facilitators; barriers and the challenges provides a useful basis for refining and enhancing the current rehabilitative strategies. The necessity of developing specific recovery package for patients with frequent readmission is indicated. This study also reflects similar perceptions on the challenges and facilitators of the mental patients with frequent readmission for community integration among three parties. The study also highlights the importance of peer support for the three parties mentioned above. Besides, enhancing the concepts of Recovery Oriented care for the patients and carers can increase recovery hope , sense of participation of own treatment plan and confidence on mental illness management which may minimize the frequency of psychiatric readmission. Through the focus group of mental health professionals, it gains a better insight on their thought of current roles and responsibilities on mental recovery as well as their limitations and fluctuation. This allows the management a remark in the future strategic plan to i