



Resolution Statement #3

Mental Health First Aid Training For Canadian Nursing Students

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Approved by: CNSA National Assembly

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Introduction/Background

One in five Canadians will experience a mental health disorder in a year; by the age of 40, 50% of Canadians have had a mental illness (Canadian Mental Health Association, n.d.; Mental Health First Aid Canada, n.d.-b). Although mental illness is prevalent in our Canadian population, it is seldom addressed in society and healthcare and as Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Canada explains “if I sprain my ankle, chances are you’ll know what to do. If I have a panic attack, chances are you won’t” (Mental Health First Aid Canada, n.d.-a). As one of the largest professions within healthcare, and most trusted, it is pivotal that Canadian nurses are trained adequately in mental health first aid to help this needs of this growing population. MHFA first originated in Australia and studies conducted to evaluate the training have shown the training to be effective (Kitchener & Jorm, 2008; Mental Health First Aid Australia, n.d.). Preliminary studies on the outcome of MFHA training in Canada have yielded positive results (Government of Canada, 2016).

As with Standard First Aid, MHFA is intended to provide support to an individual until professional help arrives to prevent or attempt to control a crisis (Mental Health First Aid Canada, n.d.-b; Morgan, Ross, & Reavley, 2018). Completion of MHFA training is correlated to the improved confidence of participants in their ability to support somebody experiencing a mental health crisis or exacerbation (Morgan, Ross, & Reavley, 2018). The intent of MHFA training is not to replace seeking professional help but to empower the individual taking the training to have an increased awareness, increased confidence and decrease stigma (Mental Health First Aid Canada, n.d.-b). MHFA helps to decrease stigmatizing attitudes, and positively change nursing students perceptions regarding this equity-seeking population (Gapp, 2019).

CNSA’s Current Position on the Topic



The proposed resolution statement addresses CNSA Objective B: *influence and advance innovation and social justice in the nursing curriculum and the nursing profession*, as well as Objective C: *strengthening linkages and creating new partnerships*.

Regarding Objective B, there is potential to address the four outcomes of this objective through curriculum development. Firstly, CNSA may advocate for curriculum development through three avenues: its national presence as an organization, its presence in the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN), and through our delegates at the chapter level. Thus, students may be involved in consultations surrounding how and where such training would fit into curricula (as this will be unique to every chapter). Moreover, when delegates involve their members and faculty in such a task, that will have tangible outcomes to their school, it will raise awareness of CNSA goals and values. Lastly, MHFA is evidence-based and invites students to conduct formal or informal research into its benefits to students and its outcomes in practice. In this way, CNSA will be a leader in advocating for and developing evidence-based and best-practice guidelines. Delegates and CNSA members will positively represent nursing as a discipline and a profession and have a tangible impact on client care nationally.

Lastly, regarding Objective C, the three outcomes of this objective may be reached by integrating MHFA training into nursing curriculum. This will be achieved through engaging with external organizations as partners in this process; for example, we may engage with the Canadian Mental Health Alliance or MHFA Canada. As well, our members will have an impact on external organizations through bridging the gap that often exists between students and national nursing organizations, through voicing our values and goals, and by inspiring other healthcare fields to become Mental Health advocates.

Current position statements that are linked to the proposed resolution includes *Incorporation of Mental Health Into All Primary Care*, which was approved during the 2019 CNSA AGM (Canadian Nursing Students' Association, 2019).

Rationale

WHEREAS, the CNSA considers it imperative nursing students have the skills to support individuals experiencing Mental Health crises or exacerbations,

WHEREAS, there are no current national standards for MHFA training in nursing curricula,

WHEREAS, Mental Health curricula and experiences afforded to students may vary by chapter,

BE IT RESOLVED,

That the CNSA support and advocate for MHFA training throughout our membership,



BE IT RESOLVED,

That the CNSA will begin investigating this process through discussions with stakeholders, etc.

Relation to Canadian Nursing School Curriculums

While, mental health education is integrated into nursing curriculums throughout Canada, MHFA training is not a requirement. The necessity for MHFA may be considered similar of Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation training, which is mandated by nursing schools before entering the program and throughout. Curricula would benefit from MHFA through the promotion of preventive and community health, dissemination of mental health resources and research, and through normalizing mental illness among their students to decrease stigma surrounding mental health crises and mental illness. Students would benefit through increased levels of confidence and capability and the transferability of these skills to their personal lives. Moreover, the necessity of this resolution statement can also be linked to the importance of our position on *Incorporation of Mental Health into All Primary Care* (Canadian Nursing Students' Association, 2019).

According to the CASN, there is a necessity for a “Foundational knowledge of the health related needs of diverse clients in rural and urban settings to provide promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative, and end-of- life nursing care. Knowledge regarding healthy work environments including collaborative skills, leadership theories, and effective team functioning and conflict resolution. The ability to counsel and educate clients to promote health, symptom and disease management. The ability to facilitate client navigation through health care services. The ability to advocate for change to address issues of social justice, health equity, and other disparities affecting the health of clients.” (Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing, 2015).

Conclusion

Half of all Canadians will live with a mental illness or experience a mental health crisis throughout their life. The stigma surrounding mental health means that while all of us experience varying levels of mental illness and wellness and maximum and minimum mental disorder, many of us will not discuss it (Halter, Pollard, & Jakubec, 2019). Equipping nursing students with MHFA will increase awareness of mental health disorders, normalize mental health issues and reduce stigma, and improve capability during a crisis. This training would be complementary to mental health education already in place in curricula. Therefore, be it resolved that the CNSA support and advocate for MHFA training throughout our membership and be it further resolved that the CNSA will begin investigating this process through discussions with stakeholders, etc.

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