

# **Mental Health Nurse Academics (UK)**

## **Position Paper 2**

### ***Mental Health Nursing and Research***

***Date issued: December 2004***

Mental Health Nurse Academics (UK) brings together representatives from all UK Higher Education Institutions engaged in mental health nursing education and research. The group advises on issues related to mental health nursing and shares good practice and innovation in this field.

This second Position Paper from Mental Health Nurse Academics (UK) focuses on developing and sustaining a research active mental health nursing workforce. The Paper is aimed at commissioners and providers of mental health education, national and local policy makers, service providers and practitioners, and all other groups with an interest in how mental health nurses are enabled to critique, employ and conduct research.

## **Mental Health Nurse Academics (UK) consider that:**

1. Research activity should be a core component of mental health nurse academic posts and is essential in the drive to improve standards of mental health care through the development of evidence-based practice. Education provider contracts need to recognise this and allow time and resources for all academic staff to pursue research activities.
2. Collaboration with service users and the public at all stages of the research cycle is essential to ensure the relevance and success of mental health research. Specific funding streams are required to develop and support meaningful ongoing user involvement with mental health nursing researchers.
3. Capacity building, knowledge transfer, effective dissemination and practice development are all key aspects of research activity aimed at improving standards of practice. Research calls and contracts should make specific provision for detailed knowledge transfer as essential elements of practice-focussed research activity.

## ***Introduction***

Mental health research is defined as systematic investigation that generates knowledge to inform mental health practice and provision within a modern inter-professional structure, where collaboration on research and practice development between professional and non-professional groups is vital to meet the health and social care needs of individuals and communities. The following position statements have been developed to support research in the area of mental health practice, and particularly mental health nursing.

## ***Research active mental health nurse academics***

MHNA(UK) believes that all mental health nurse academics should aim to be research active or active research consumers. A critical understanding of current research developments and methods should inform teaching and all other educational activity. Encouragement, advice, mentoring and incentives should be provided to ensure a research active workforce. Those with recognised talent for research, including the dissemination of research into practice, should be identified and encouraged. Lead researchers have a key position as role models, providing training and support. Research teams and collaboration between organisations should be encouraged and developed, particularly with staff in less research minded departments. Whilst competition is healthy and can enhance research quality, MHNAUK upholds the view that collaboration and the sharing of knowledge and skills will improve research and practice and that no one organisation should hold a dominant position as this may undermine the impact of research on practice.

### ***Supporting and developing research capacity***

Mental health nursing research requires support through education, finance, management and a dynamic approach to the recruitment, development and retention of research capable staff in order to build capacity. Targeted funding is required to support research education and training, dissemination, fellowships, attachments and sabbaticals, and the appointment of research assistants and fellows in order to develop the research base necessary for evidence based practice. Research needs to be established as a key component of all mental health nursing education and professional development from diploma level onwards. Research grounded in practice and responsive to the needs of service providers and users should be embedded in the aims and learning outcomes of all modules to highlight the application of research to practice and to enable practitioners to consider, critique and respond to research within the framework of research governance.

### ***Dissemination of research***

MHNAUK believe that researchers have a responsibility to make research findings accessible and understandable. It therefore follows that researchers, both from academic and practice backgrounds, should be involved in the provision of educational programmes to present and discuss research and stimulate critical understanding and appraisal. The dissemination of findings should be focussed on the development of practice, targeted at as wide an audience as possible, and supported by those skilled in practice development.

### ***Delivering evidence-based practice***

MHNAUK recommends the establishment of joint NHS/HEI research development groups aimed at promoting and developing evidence-based practice. To this end, MHNAUK encourages the utilisation of creative, flexible approaches that support collaborative research activity. This includes the employment of lecturer practitioners and nurse consultants; funding and supporting joint doctoral and post-doctoral positions; organising joint practice-education supervisors for researchers; shared running of journal clubs and research seminars; and the utilisation of IT networks to establish 'virtual' research dissemination environments. Research should be communicated in ways that enhance accessibility and application to practice and should meet the needs of the entire workforce, service users and carers, for example through a range of journals, magazines, newsletters, websites, conferences and educational outreach.

### ***User and Carer Involvement***

MHNAUK are committed to the principles and practice of user and carer involvement in research, research dissemination and practice development. The group acknowledges that the relationship between users, carers, researchers, practitioners and educationalists is fluid and could be one of collaboration with users and carers, consultation with users and carers or user-led. The user and carer perspective should guide projects and users and carers should be increasingly involved in evaluating research activities and findings to promote research that is meaningful and change orientated.

### ***Promoting and supporting diversity***

MHNAUK believe that the diversity of specialisms within mental health requires representation and support in the fields of research, dissemination and practice development. Support should include human and financial resources, collaboration across disciplines, expert supervision, and specialist centres of research excellence. MHNAUK will aim to establish a database of contacts in specific specialisms to encourage and support collaborative networks and knowledge sharing. Information from such networks will be fed back into education and research locally, nationally and internationally utilising established conferences, journals, networks and online resources.

### ***Influencing policy***

MHNAUK believe that mental health nurse researchers can best influence mental health policy by engaging politically, collaborating with influential stakeholders and using research to influence and inform policy, law and practice. The MHNAUK group will be in a position to bring together key and influential stakeholders in order to facilitate such positive alliances.

This is the second in a series of Position Papers to be issued by MHNA(UK). Consultation with MHNA(UK) representatives and production of this paper took place between April and November 2004. Coordinators of this Position Paper were Alan Simpson (City University London) and Naomi Sharples (University of Salford, Manchester).

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