

Changing the “Identified Patient” – Evaluating a Family-Focussed, Trauma-Informed Model of Care for Adolescents in Psychiatric Inpatient Units

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Background:

Severe mental illness amongst adolescents is a growing concern in Australia – in NSW there was a reported 40% increase in self-harm and suicide-related presentations to hospital for adolescents from 2019 to 2021. With psychiatric inpatient units thus meeting an important need within the healthcare system through supporting acutely unwell adolescents, it is of great concern that there is limited research into how to deliver developmentally appropriate and effective care in these restrictive settings.

Approach:

Over the past 2 years, the Brolga Unit – and adolescent acute psychiatric inpatient unit - in NSW has completed a series of quality improvement projects based on patient, carer, and staff feedback regarding all parties’ experience of our ward environment. Based on these reflections we have developed a series of novel clinical interventions to update our Model of Care (MoC) to be more attachment-focussed and trauma-informed.

Outcome:

The Brolga MoC holds a young persons family and social system as the key to recovery, rather than a focus on “fixing” the young person or medicalising their mental health concerns. We present the current qualitative and quantitative outcomes regarding the efficacy of these interventions, and share our approach to addressing implementation challenges to enacting service-level cultural shifts in mental healthcare for adolescents.

Innovation and Significance:

The Brolga MoC clinical research programme represents a crucial addition to scarce literature regarding how to best care for some of our most vulnerable patient populations. Through improving understanding of how the inpatient setting can be more effectively family-centred, trauma-informed, and community-focussed, we hope such a model will significantly reduce likelihood of perpetuated harm through hospitalisation, and improve clinical outcomes and recovery trajectories for adolescents who encounter the inpatient mental health environment.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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