

From Policy to Practice: Sustainable statewide workforce development in Family Based Therapy (FBT) for anorexia nervosa in children and adolescents

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Background/Purpose:

Anorexia nervosa is a serious psychiatric disorder, which commonly emerges during adolescence, and can lead to life-threatening medical complications. Early, effective intervention is critical. FBT is the recommended first-line treatment for children and adolescents yet demand for therapy exceeds service capacity. There is an urgent need to train clinicians and support them to provide evidence-based care.

Approach:

The cornerstone of the tiered training model is a two-day face-to-face FBT training. In preparation for this intensive training, participants complete pre-requisite eLearning: FBT for children and adolescents with anorexia nervosa: The basics. Post training, case-based learning provides an opportunity for participants to consolidate their learnings in the workplace. The next tier of training is a one-day intensive Advanced FBT to support clinicians to further develop their skills. The Train-the-trainer program 'closes the loop', training new leaders to deliver the two-day FBT training enabling sustainability in the model.

Outcomes/Impact:

We evaluated pre-post training improvements in learning outcomes for 162 health professionals who attended FBT face-to-face training between June 2021 to May 2025. Prerequisite eLearning completion was high (>90%). Learners showed large improvements in knowledge, skill, and confidence in applying FBT (*Cohens' d*=.81-1.4). Largest improvements in skill occurred among clinicians with <1 year or >10 years of general clinical experience.

Innovation and Significance:

This tiered, supported, sustainable model of workforce training targets the concerning research-practice gap in early intervention for anorexia nervosa. By incorporating flexible eLearning with intensive, practical face-to-face training within a tiered structure tailored to clinicians' level of experience and caseload, this sustainable model demonstrates suitability for broader national policy adoption and implementation. Implementing a sustainable tiered workforce development program opens pathways to a skilled workforce enabling early intervention, reduced illness progression, improved quality of life, return to normal adolescence and hope for full recovery from an eating disorder for young people in our communities.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

InsideOut Institute is funded by NSW Ministry of Health