

Quality Improvement Project - Psychodynamic aspects of forensic care

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Introduction

The relational component of care is paramount to forensic psychiatry. Psychodynamic aspects of it dive deeply into the importance of relationships and early life experiences, the meaning of symptoms, transference and countertransference, and the result of staff’s prolonged exposure to violence and mental disturbance.

Methods

The aim of this Quality Improvement Project was to enhance the level of awareness and confidence in psychodynamic and relational aspects of forensic care through a series of 5 structured teaching sessions on the following themes : emotional labour, attachment theory, defence mechanisms, personality structure and mentalization. Pre- and post-teaching confidence scores were compared to determine the impact of the intervention. The surveys employed a 9-point ordinal Likert Scale, and qualitative feedback was reviewed for future recommendations.

Change in Mean Score per Question (Post – Pre)



Figure 1. Horizontal bar chart showing the change in mean score (post minus pre) for each question. Green = improvement; red = decline; grey = minimal change (within ±0.05).

"Time out to refresh and consolidate understanding and apply to recent patients I have worked with."

"Excellent recap of important topics. Very impressed by how accessible it was to all disciplines."

Perceived Benefits of the Teaching Sessions

"It deepened my understanding of my interactions with patients".

"Reflection on transference/Countertransference"

"Learning more of my own feelings and trying to understand my patients".

"Will take greater time out to consider the dynamic and impact of own attachments and those of the patient. Also, the role of the structure of Forensic services as offering an attachment which patients have not achieved in their own lives and how that impacts on how they react – including violent behaviour, anxiety, distrust or self-sabotage."

"Made me conscious of how I deal with other’s emotions plus what effects it has on my emotions, thoughts, actions."

Results

Mean total confidence scores improved following the teaching intervention, with the largest visible improvements in the areas: mindfulness of early caregiving, impact of own attachment patterns on care provided, using feelings as a clinical tool and detection of defence mechanisms. Qualitative thematic analysis commended accessibility of content and consolidation of existing knowledge.

Conclusions

A brief, structured teaching programme on psychodynamic aspects of forensic care can meaningfully shift staff confidence, showing that the teaching was most impactful where there was an unmet educational need. Recommendations are to formally embed teaching sessions into staff induction programmes and increase the use of local clinical vignettes in reflective practice.