

# Incorporating the consumer and carer perspectives in mental health training

The GPMHSC promotes the active involvement of consumers and carers in general practice mental health education. Mental health skills training (MHST) and focussed psychological strategies (FPS) skills training incorporate learning objectives that relate directly to the consumer and carer experience.

To meet these objectives, the 'lived experience' of consumers and carers must be incorporated within these programs as outlined in *A Framework for professional development in mental health for GPs 2014–16*.

A 'consumer' in this context is a person who has personal experience of mental illness, who may or may not have accessed mental health services.

A 'carer' in this context is a person who is directly involved in the care of a person with a mental illness because of a familial or social relationship to that person.

## Importance of the consumer and carer perspectives

The involvement of consumers and carers is critical during the development of education and training in mental health. This position reflects the priority placed on consumer and carer participation in decision and policy making within national mental health plans and agendas.

Consumer and carer engagement in GPMHSC accredited programs enables general practitioners (GPs) to develop a greater understanding and appreciation of the issues facing people living with mental health disorders and their carers in the community. Sharing experiences associated with their journeys allows GPs to consider strategies that may be useful in enhancing the provision of mental healthcare in their communities.

## GPMHSC standards and requirements for consumer and carers engagement during MHST and FPS skills training activities

The perspectives of consumers and carers are frequently different, therefore it is important that each perspective is actively and independently addressed during all of the four stages of training as outlined below.

### Planning:

- at least one consumer and at least one carer must be actively involved in the formal planning processes
- consumers and carers should each be represented on planning or advisory groups, whether these are formally or informally constituted.

### Development:

- both consumers and carers should actively contribute to the selection and/or development of program content including materials and resources
- input can be provided via experienced individual advocates, or through substantial consultation with focus groups.

### Delivery:

- an experienced consumer and carer should contribute to the delivery of training by presenting their perspectives in person through an interactive session with opportunity for questions
- a minimum of 15 minutes should be allocated for each separate consumer and carer presentation.

### Review:

- at least one consumer and at least one carer must be involved in the formal review of mental health training during which objectives are reviewed and the success of the program evaluated.

## Both consumers and carers should:

- contribute to the program from their perspective and must not take on other or dual roles, for example, a carer who has also experienced mental illness should not represent both the carer and consumer perspectives
- be appropriately skilled to effectively contribute to the planning, development, delivery and review stages
- have previously contributed to multidisciplinary projects in primary care or other mental health sector programs
- be appropriately supported in a sensitive manner throughout all four stages as described above
- be appropriately networked through a recognised consumer or carer advocacy organisation
- The GPMHSC encourages active consumer and carer involvement in mental health and FPS continuing professional development activities, however it is not a core requirement.

## Talking points for consumers and carers

Consumers and carers may lead a specific section of the activity to discuss the consumer and carer perspectives on treatment and recovery, or give insight into the lived experience of mental illness.

These interactive discussions may be best facilitated through an interview style presentation. Appropriately experienced consumers may also give feedback during role plays or demonstrations.

Use of the following questions may assist in extracting the key points relating to the consumer and carer perspectives for the GPs consideration.

### Consumer questions:

- Can you tell us a little about the mental health condition you have, and how long you have had this condition?
- How has your mental health condition impacted on your life?
- What is the greatest difficulty or challenge you have in living with your mental health condition?
- What has been most helpful about your relationship with your GP and/or the healthcare system?
- What has been unhelpful about your relationship with your GP and/or the healthcare system?
- If you were giving advice to GPs who may not be very experienced at dealing with people living with your health condition, what would you say to them?
- Do you have any useful advice for GPs about their relationship with their patients?

### Carer questions:

- What is your relationship with the mental health consumer and what is their mental health condition?
- How long have you been in the role as a carer?
- How has being a carer of someone living with a mental health condition had an impact on you?
- Do you think that being a carer has affected your own health? Why?
- What is the greatest difficulty or challenge you have in being a carer?
- What advice would you give to GPs in regard to partnering and/or assisting carers in their role?

### Accessing consumers and carers at a local level

Training providers may wish to use existing networks to source suitable consumers and carers to participate in the planning, development, delivery and review of the education activity.

Where providers are experiencing difficulty in engaging consumers and/or carers at any stage, the GPMHSC recommends contacting the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA). This organisation may be able to assist in accessing experienced and skilled consumers and carers at a local level.

**MHCA** [www.mhca.org.au](http://www.mhca.org.au)

Consumer and Carer Project Officer 02 6285 3100

## FAQs

### Can I use a video recording instead of having a consumer and carer present in person?

The GPMHSC require consumers and carers to present their perspectives in person during the delivery of training activities.

If training providers remain unable to engage an appropriate consumer and/or carer after working with organisations, the training program should be formally reviewed by the MHCA or delegate, and the outcomes of this review must be included in the training submission to the GPMHSC, along with documentation demonstrating that these outcomes have been incorporated within the program.

In cases where this process has been followed and where there are extenuating circumstances, such as delivery of a program in a remote centre, the GPMHSC may exempt a provider from the requirement to have a consumer and/or a carer present their perspectives in person by using an approved video recording.

In this scenario, training providers must submit a letter with the application form outlining how and what attempts were made to engage a consumer and carer and how their perspectives will be incorporated into the training program in a meaningful way.

Three copies of the proposed video recording are to be submitted with the application for review by the consumer and carer representatives of the GPMHSC Committee.

### Do we still need to source consumers and carers to deliver their perspectives in person when delivering training across a number of different locations?

The GPMHSC still requires training providers who are planning on delivering training across a number of locations to source consumers and carers to deliver their perspectives in person on the day.

However, the GPMHSC may exempt a provider who is delivering the activity in a rural and/or a remote setting and enable the use of an approved video recording to ensure the consumer and carer perspectives are still being adequately addressed.

Training providers may wish to contact MHCA to help locate consumers and carers at the local level.

For queries relating to the GPMHSC's consumer and carer standards contact the GPMHSC Secretariat via [gpmhsc@racgp.org.au](mailto:gpmhsc@racgp.org.au) or [www.racgp.org.au/gpmhsc](http://www.racgp.org.au/gpmhsc).