



Mental Health Issues of the Incarcerated Patient

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ABSTRACT

Problem Statement: How can DNP prepared nurses impact change for inmates with serious mental health issues?

Purpose: (1) To promote awareness through evidence based research, education, publication, and presentation at the DNP National Conference. (2) Political advocacy as an intern and nursing consultant for Uptown People's Law Center.

Methodology: PICOT, database searches (EBSCO, Google, Medline) of research and non-research on mental health, incarceration and DNP impact within five years of publication. Critical appraisal via Joanna Briggs Institute. Human Subjects Protection noted, no IRB approval required.

Significance: DNP nurses have great influence in providing change for the incarcerated. Implications include inter professional education to address mental health issues in the prison systems, proposals for funding, recruitment for more DNP nurses, and development of mental health facilities. DNP involvement promotes advocacy, autonomy, and future opportunities to establish and improve mental health programs in forensic nursing.

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INTRODUCTION

The United States prison systems are currently facing a crisis in providing care for patients with mental health issues. Many inmates with psychiatric disorders enter the prison systems due to lack of mental health facilities, inadequate health care, and funding to receive continuous treatment. Serious mental illness (SMI) has become so prevalent that local and state prisons are now considered the new asylums. Upon admission, inmates face further disconnect from society. Currently, there is a high turnover of medical and nursing personnel to care for the incarcerated along with legal constraints identified between health care companies and correctional facilities.

Mental health patients who face poverty, crime, unemployment, homelessness, substance abuse, and victimization do not receive the best medical treatment due to these risk factors. Social marginalization causes further prevail for this vulnerable population, especially those at prison systems. Prison systems in the United States are not designed or well equipped to provide mental health services.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Inclusion criteria: Research and non-research articles within five years of publication due to the vast amount of information on mental health, incarceration, treatment, and DNP impact for change noted via EBSCO, Google, and Medline.

Exclusion criteria: Articles greater than five years did not apply and address the health inequities of this vulnerable population.

Critical Appraisal: Joanna Briggs Institute critical appraisal tool for articles was utilized.

Human Subjects Protection: According to the U.S. Department of Human Health and Services (2016), research is a systematic investigation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. This DNP project involved systematic review of literature, seminars, other means of increasing knowledge and evaluating the problem at hand. It does not require research, investigation, or evaluation of any human subjects, therefore no IRB application or approval was required, and 45 CFR part 46 does not apply

RESULTS

Al-Rousan et al. (2017) focused on how the medical and nursing professions must implement substance abuse, harm reduction, and jail diversion programs for mental health inmates. Forensic APNs and DNP's can collaborate with correctional facilities and with outside community services to reduce recidivism rates.

Christensen (2014) focused her study on cultural aspects for the incarcerated. Recommended nursing implications are the incorporation of Leininger's transcultural theory along with the development of cultural competency and sensitivity. Classes and seminars on cultural competency within forensics are recommended.

Fazel et al. (2016) provided several recommendations. Systems must be established with screening tools, suicide prevention strategies, evidence-based psychological, and pharmacological mental health treatments must be provided. Methadone maintenance therapy, provision of cognitive behavioral therapies for relapse prevention, and day time focused programs are highly recommended. From a research perspective, screening tools and longitudinal studies are highly recommended to translate the evidence of mental health protocols into scientific research and practice.

Frisman et al. (2017) conducted a study in the state of Connecticut on the ASIST program. This particular program serves arraignment for inmates with mental health illness. Primary goal is to enhance community supervision.



DNP RECOMMENDATIONS

DNP involvement is approached on a holistic level with cultural sensitivity. Research on the causes and consequences of incarceration and how to mitigate the effects is conducted on an ongoing basis. DNP nurses help bridge boundaries between health care organizations and criminal justice institutions through inter professional education and collaboration. DNP nurses advocate for policies that increase the health and well-being of mental health individuals, families, and communities.

DNP nurses help plan treatment and rehabilitation alternatives, to advocate for nurse-led interventions. Active and participatory roles in the political and social arenas are imperative. DNP advocacy is the catalyst for health care, political, and systems changes. However, as with any challenge, this is an arduous and long-term process. DNP nurses involved in Congress, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) organizations promote more awareness and education on this vulnerable population.

CONCLUSIONS

DNP nurses have great influence in providing change and promoting better outcomes. Implications for involvement include inter professional collaboration with correctional facilities, health care professionals, and lawmakers. Proposals for grant money with policymakers and stakeholders to address the mental health issues in the prison and community based settings are required. DNP involvement promotes advocacy, autonomy, and future opportunities to establish and improve mental health outcomes.

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