

## **Abusive Nurses**

So inadequately trained psychiatric nurses are being abused by patients with a mental illness (The Age, 19/01/04). What about the number of patients with a mental illness who are abused by inadequately trained psychiatric nurses? After all, it is not only nurses who suffer from a lack of resources in mental health services. Patients suffer too.

Abusive language and violent behaviour are sometimes symptoms of acute mental illness. Rather than respond compassionately to this behaviour, mental health practitioners often respond punitively. Take, for example, transfer to hospital. Although ambulances are used for physical emergencies, patients with an acute mental illness are often transported in the back of a police divisional van. Is it any wonder many people arrive at hospital feeling angry and abusive?

In psychiatric wards, patients who are angry and abusive are quickly restrained. This restraint is often physical and pharmacological: patients are locked up and medicated, often against their will. The more inexperienced the health care professional, the quicker the restraining.

A psychiatric ward is easily recognisable by the large number of heavily medicated patients sitting around while staff observe from the nurses' station. Rather than undertake meaningful therapeutic activities with patients, inexperienced health care professionals prefer to keep a "safe distance" from patients.

Allocating more resources to the mental health system is clearly important. But resources alone will not fix many of the underlying problems.

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