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ACMHN Toolkit addressing workplace fear and increasing safety for all

The Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN) is proud to launch the 'Safe in Care, Safe at Work' toolkit - a project funded and supported by the National Mental Health Commission (NMHC) - to further facilitate safety in care and safety for staff in Australian mental health services.

Least restrictive practice has long been a focus and aspiration in mental health care and is framed as an indicator of care quality in mental health settings. The desire to achieve least restrictive practice is reflected in the many policies, guidelines and other guiding documents in place locally, nationally and internationally.

There have been significant changes in the use of restrictive practices over recent years, but more still needs to be done. It has become clear that enhancing safety for staff, particularly nursing staff, is a crucial aspect of achieving further reductions in the use of seclusion and restraint.

The 'Safe in Care, Safe at Work' toolkit recognises the unique contribution of nurses to the provision of mental health services across Australia. It has been designed to complement and support existing national and state guidelines and frameworks, and to support the overall strategy to create safer therapeutic environments for consumers and to eliminate seclusion and restraint in mental health services.

ACMHN President, Professor Eimear Muir-Cochrane said that it is crucial that people feel safe as recipients of healthcare and when using mental health services and it is equally as important for staff to feel safe in their work environment. "We hope that this toolkit will assist health services in the development of a work plan to equip services, managers and nurses with a range of options to create safer services and to support nurses feeling safe".

The use of restrictive practices such as seclusion and restraint are traumatic for staff and consumers and are acknowledged as failures in care. Consistent re-examination of approaches to safety in the context of mental health service provision and recognition and promotion of strategies that support nurses to be and feel safer at work, will help build confidence of nurses around early recognition, intervention and de-escalation, and will support nurse leaders to achieve environmental, systemic and service goals around seclusion and restraint reduction.

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