

# RESEARCH CONNECTION

## The experiences of undergraduate psychiatric nursing peer mentors

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### Why this research is important

Throughout the course of their undergraduate careers, students experience many challenges associated with academic demands along with stressors inherent to daily life. These challenges may be experienced as overwhelming. Peer mentorship programs have been utilized as a tool to combat some of these stressors in a variety of undergraduate programs, including psychiatric nursing. Psychiatric nursing is a distinct nursing profession that places significant importance on relationships, support, and communication. Little is known about the experiences of psychiatric nursing peer mentors within these programs.

### What you need to know

The Brandon University Department of Psychiatric Nursing established a peer support program in 2017. The purpose of the peer mentorship program was to establish a peer support network for students studying in the psychiatric nursing program. Within this program, psychiatric nursing students in year two are considered the *mentees*, and students in year three are the *mentors*. The role of the mentor is to provide support to their mentee(s).

### How the research was conducted

Research assistants conducted nine semi-structured interviews with psychiatric nursing students who had acted as mentors. All the participants were female, whose ages ranged from 20 to 29. Three participants' highest educational level was a high school diploma, two held a college diploma, and four had an alternative undergraduate degree.

The average length of the interview was approximately 45 minutes. Interview questions focused on understanding the mentors' roles, experiences, and relationships with their mentee(s). The interviews were audio-recorded. The researchers analyzed the transcribed interviews for meaningful themes. These themes were then shared with the participants to verify that their voices had been accurately captured.

### What the researchers found

The findings of this study are based on the experiences of undergraduate psychiatric nursing student peer mentors.

The participants reported the use of important skills valued by the profession of psychiatric nursing throughout their mentorship experience. Themes of support, relationships, boundaries, communication, empathy, and leadership were voiced. All of the mentors reported a desire to have increased expectations placed on the mentor role; they wanted to do more and give more to their mentees. In addition, the participants reported that there was a lack of structure or guidance regarding the expectations of the mentorship program. Several participants voiced that the mentorship program could be improved through increased guidelines and communication regarding the purpose of the program and student roles.

### How this research can be used

The majority of literature available has focused on positive implications for the mentees within mentorship programs. A better understanding of the mentors' experiences has proven valuable as involvement may have helped enhance psychiatric nursing skills. Enhanced written guidelines and

ongoing communication from the program's facilitators involving mentee/mentor roles and program process would better assist those involved. The peer mentorship program needs to be recognized and supported within undergraduate settings, including psychiatric nursing.

### About the researchers

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