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Putting recovery into action at Mental Health Symposium

Supporting people with a mental health illness on their roads to recovery will be the central theme of the South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) Mental Health Recovery Symposium on Tuesday, 10 September, 2013.

The theme of the Recovery Symposium – ‘*Walk the Talk: Putting Recovery into Action*,’ will focus on putting the principles of recovery into practice when providing services for people with a mental illness. The Symposium will be attended by mental health clinicians, consumer workers and managers from South Eastern Sydney and beyond.

Jo Sommer, Rehabilitation Clinical Coordinator, SESLHD, said the Recovery Symposium will showcase and celebrate successful local initiatives that support recovery and will provide an international perspective on current approaches to recovery-oriented mental health practice.

“Recovery in mental health is different to traditional concepts of recovery. It refers to living a satisfying, self-directed, contributing life and everyone is capable of achieving this. Using this concept, research from the World Health Organisation shows that people are more likely to recover when they are part of their local communities and have valued roles in family life, the community and at work,” Ms Sommer said.

“Programs that focus on wellness rather than illness – that foster hope and help people with mental illness discover meaning and purpose in their lives, while remaining connected with their communities – are essential in supporting recovery,” she said.

“The Strengths Model and the VETE employment initiative are examples of successful programs that assist people with psychiatric disabilities to recover, reclaim and transform their lives by focusing on individual strengths rather than deficits.”

Ms Sommer said a relatively new approach being recognised as critical in a recovery-oriented service is the employment of people with lived experience of mental illness in specialist peer support worker roles.

“Having experienced mental illness themselves, peer support workers are able to provide hope to service users by modelling and encouraging people to take greater control over their own recovery. Studies show that peer support workers are effective in engaging people in mental health services and have a positive impact on self esteem, confidence, social skills and creating social networks.

“The peer support workforce is expanding in SESLHD in recognition of the vital part these roles play in supporting others in their personal recovery journeys. This will be a feature of the Symposium,” she said.

A number of high profile speakers are presenting at the Symposium, including, Mary O’Hagan, international consultant on service user perspectives and mental health recovery; Sandy Watson, lived experience educator and co-director of Insideout and Associates Australia, and Leanne Craze, director of Craze Lateral Solutions, who will be presenting the new National Recovery Framework, an important guide for mental health services in orienting service provision to support the recovery of people with mental health problems.

Ms Sommer said current statistics show that one in five people are affected or know someone affected by some form of mental illness during the course of their life. Despite this high prevalence, there continues to be a great deal of stigma attached to the experience of mental illness.

“The Recovery Symposium will enable us to bring together mental health service providers and service users to showcase successful initiatives and future directions, and learn from people with lived experience of mental illness about what needs to be done to progress our service even further in recovery-oriented practice,” she said.

The Symposium is not open to the general public or people working outside of mental health.