Mental Health Nursing
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Assertive community treatment for the Homeless mentally ill patient

Millions of men and women across the entire country go days, weeks, and years living on the streets of inner cities. The socioeconomic turmoil of our country has forced individuals to vacate their once beloved homes and forced into inhuman conditions for the sake of survival (Fisher, C., 2017). These are mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, aunts, and uncles who have been struck by unfortunate circumstances during society's economical decline. There circumstances have led them to become homeless, but they are no less than you and I. Homelessness is a growing concern for all states, cities, and towns across the United States (Fisher, C., 2017). The number of individuals across the entire country who lack stable housing and the finances for general life necessities which include food, water, and safety has steadily increased over the past several years. The reason that some individuals experience homelessness includes poverty, mental illness, and substance abuse disorders (Fisher, C., 2017). The results of experiencing homelessness includes many negative social impacts included worsening physical health, declining mental health, development of mental illnesses, substance abuse disorders, and dental injuries. Research has suggested that approximately 552,830 Americans were homeless in January 2018 and approximately 33 percent were entire families (Fisher, C., 2017). These individuals were found living on the street, in abandoned buildings, shelters, abandoned cars, and in other unstable living conditions. The national average of homelessness is approximately

0.18% of the population, the regions that noted this highest homeless population included Washington, D.C, then Hawaii, and

in third place was New York (Fisher, C., 2017). The contributing factors that have often led to homelessness includes poverty, loss of a job, and the inability to afford rising hosing prices. Accordingly, poverty in the United States is defines as not having enough material possessions or income for a person's or families basic needs. The United States Census report has projected an increased poverty rate of 9.2% for the duration of the 2020 year. Contributing factors of poverty also includes the loss of a job, with the economical decline associated with the coronavirus pandemic many individuals have been furloughed or terminated. This has caused individuals and families to become unable to pay housing fees, afford food, and ultimately become homeless. Many different factors contribute to the occurrence of an individual becoming homeless (Cohen, S., Clarc, K., and Frederick, T., 2019).

The effects of becoming homeless are a harsh reality that many individuals must encounter daily. Researchers have noted that metal health is the third largest cause for homelessness and an estimated one third of the current United States homeless population suffers from some form of mental illness. The two leading mental health disorders associated with homelessness includes schizophrenia and bipolar disorder (Cohen, S., Clarc, K., and Frederick, T., 2019). Schizophrenia is a serious mental health disorder that affects how individuals interpret reality. Schizophrenia causes hallucinations, delusions, distorted thinking, and impairs daily function (Cohen, S., Clarc, K., and Frederick, T., 2019). Individuals diagnosed with Schizophrenia require lifelong treatment which includes but not limited to medication such as

haloperidol, paliperidone, fluphenazine decanoate, and risperidone (Cohen, S., Clarc, K., and Frederick, T., 2019). Bipolar disorder is a mental illness that is marked by extreme shifts in a person's mood. These mood swings consist of emotional highs and lows such as mania, hypomania, and depression. The optimal treatment for

bipolar disorders includes mood stabilizing medication such as lithium, valproic acid, and carbamazepine (Cohen, S., Clarc, K., and Frederick, T., 2019). With the increased rate of mentally ill homeless individual's nurses serve as a vital role in the overall healthcare of individuals diagnosed with mental disorders. Other research articles have suggested that the adult population experiencing homelessness a high proportion have mental health problems (Carrico, A., Dilley, J., Leon, A., and Zheng 2016). Becoming homeless has directly correlated to individuals developing mental health disorders such as depression, suicidal ideations, and the occurrence of substance abuse disorders. Research has suggested that the role of social support and family relationships can make a difference in an individual's life and can determine if someone will become homeless (Carrico, A., Dilley, J., Leon, A., and Zheng 2016). When individuals' have someone to rely on for social support it can improve their overall mental health, these resources can make a significant difference in the support and coping of a person's life circumstances. To assist individuals who have become homeless and may suffer from mental health disorders, we should place our attention on expanding accessible health care and home placement. Increasing access to affordable healthcare will allow give individuals the opportunity to receive the necessary mental health care and prescription medication which would allow them to live a healthy life(Carrico, A., Dilley, J., Leon, A., and Zheng 2016) . There are currently state

and local agencies that will assist individuals who may experience homelessness, one example includes the Office of Temporary Housing Assistance of Westchester County. This office is available daily providing shelter to homeless families, single individuals, and children. Services like this can make a significant impact on

someone's life who may otherwise be forced to live on the street. There is a direct correlation between the development of mental illnesses and homelessness.

There are many nursing skills and interventions that can be implemented into the treatment plan of a patient suffering from mental health illnesses (Bender, W., and Coldwell, G.,2007). One nursing skill that can be implemented to aid in the treatment of a homeless patient suffering from a mental health illness includes assertive community treatment. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness there is a newly formed interdisciplinary approach that includes assertive community treatment that has proven success results (Bender, W., and Coldwell, G.,2007). This interdisciplinary approach is called an Assertive community treatment, this is a team-based treatment model that provides multidisciplinary flexible treatment and support to people with mental illnesses (Bender, W., and Coldwell, G.,2007). Research has suggested that individuals that have become involved with an Assertive community treatment team have experienced positive results and did not feel any alienation (Ewertzon, M., Israel, P., and Weimand, B., 2018). The Assertive community treatment team acknowledged and confirmed the importance of those suffering from mental health illness. The individuals who

came in contact with the Assertive community treatment team stated " They considered openness and cooperation and cooperation as an essential aspect from the professionals, this community treatment team has made a significant difference in my overall mental health" (Ewertzon, M., Israel, P., and Weimand, B., 2018). Assertive communication is key for the overall effectiveness of the community treatment for the homeless population with mental illnesses. Psychiatric research studies have suggested "the most successful studied model in the homeless population with mental illnesses is assertive community

treatment" (Fitzpatrick, K., Miller, E., and Myrstol, B., 2015). Assertive community treatment is associated with significant improvements in rates of homelessness and levels of psychiatric symptom severity. The homeless mentally ill population can often be difficult to engage in their care however with the implementation of Assertive community treatment (Fitzpatrick, K., Miller, E., and Myrstol, B., 2015).

The main purpose of the Assertive community treatment is to provide a form of community based mental health care for individuals who may be homeless (Fisher, C., 2017). The role of a nurse in this community setting is to reduce the reliance on the hospitals by providing around the clock services (Fisher, C., 2017). The nurse can facilitate the initial intake consultation to the mentally ill patient, this would give the patient the best outcome along with an individualized treatment plan. The nurse can offer transitional services to other treatment centers, the goal of Assertive community treatment is to purposefully transition the patient to other services for lifelong care. The nurse can also incorporate a holistic nursing care, this is a way of treating and taking care of the patient as a whole which encompasses the physical

environment, social environment, psychological, cultural, and religious beliefs (Fisher, C., 2017). The holistic approach is important because the Assertive community treatment is a holistic approach to treatment and nurses are professionally trained in holistic patient care services. These are various ways in which nurses can play an integral component in the development and implementation of Assertive community treatment for the homeless mentally ill patients.

Resources

Bender, W., and Coldwell, G., (2007) "The Effectiveness of Assertive Community Treatment for Homeless Population with Severe Mental Illness: A Meta-Analysis, *Am Psychiatry; 164*

Carrico, A., Dilley, J., Leon, A., and Zheng (2016) "Mental and Physical Health among Homeless Sexual and Gender Minorities in a Major Urban US City", *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine, Vol. 93, No. 6*

Cohen, S., Clarc, K., and Frederick, T., (2019) "Peer Support in the Homeless Youth Context: Requirements, Design, and Outcomes" *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*

Ewertzon, M., Israel, P., and Weimand, B., (2018) "Families in Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Teams in Norway: A Cross-Sectional Study on Relatives' Experiences of Involvement and Alienation" *Community Mental Health Journal*

Fisher, C., (2017) "Homelessness in the United States"

Fitzpatrick, K., Miller, E., and Myrstol, B., (2015) "Does Context Matter? Examining the Mental Health Among Homeless People", *Community Mental Health Journal*