



Mental health in Australia: The ideal versus financial reality and the role of the mental health nurse

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Abstract

The current mental health policy of Australia is based on an assumption that the standard of care available to people experiencing a mental illness should be of comparable standard to those experiencing a physical illness. However, despite this stated aim, a review of government expenditure clearly indicates that the current proportion of health expenditure afforded to mental health is not comparable to the prevalence of mental illness or the related burden of disease. This paper presents an overview of the prevalence and burden of disease imposed by mental illness. These figures are then discussed in light of government spending on mental health. On the basis of the information presented, it is concluded that a substantially higher proportion of health expenditure needs to be devoted to mental health, if the goals of government policy are to be realised. As the largest professional group of the mental health workforce, nurses need to seek out opportunities to influence policy towards a more favourable treatment of mental health issues.

Keywords

Australia, burden of disease, government expenditure, mental health, mental illness, nurses, policy

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