

IN-PATIENT STAFF MORALE: A NATIONAL INVESTIGATION

BRIEF SUMMARY

Currently a variety of initiatives are underway to try and improve the quality of inpatient care in the UK, but these are unlikely to succeed unless a skilled inpatient workforce of staff who are satisfied with their work can be retained. Problems with recruitment and retention, high vacancy rates, the frequent use of bank, agency and temporary staff and consequent higher costs have all been identified as significant obstacles to improvement of mental health services. Such factors lead to discontinuity of care for patients, and entail human and financial costs to individual staff and services. They also act as barriers to the development of a skilled, enthusiastic and cost-effective workforce. Unfortunately we currently know little about the causes of good and of poor staff morale. This is why the NHS Service Delivery and Organisation Research and Development Programme (SDO) has commissioned this national investigation of the causes of poor and good in-patient staff morale.

The study aims to:

- a. describe in-patient staff morale, measured by a cluster of indicators, in a large representative sample of wards.
- b. investigate factors associated with morale. The Demand-Control-Support model, a widely used framework in investigations of job stress, will inform this. Variables measured will include demand factors (e.g. staffing ratios, casemix, bed occupancy), control factors (e.g. perceived involvement in decision making) and support factors (e.g. clinical supervision, leadership, organisational climate). Physical environment and experiences of discrimination will also be investigated.
- c. compare morale between ward and community mental health team (CMHT) and crisis resolution team (CRT) staff and investigate staff's reported reasons for leaving wards.

The study will have two stages. Each will take about a year, though for individual Trusts, the main data collection phase will last only about a month.

Year 1:

Module 1: The 100 ward survey. All staff with responsibility for delivering patient care on 100 in-patient wards in 20 Mental Health Trusts in 4 regions will be surveyed. Indicators of staff morale and potential influences on morale will be examined via questionnaires to staff (taking approximately 30 minutes to complete) and to ward managers (taking approximately 45 minutes to complete).

Module 2: Comparison with community teams: Staff of 20 CMHTs and 20 CRTs will be asked to complete the same measures of morale and to report whether they have recently left in-patient wards and, if so, why.

The proposed start date for the study is 1st November 2006. The multi-disciplinary study team is lead by Dr Sonia Johnson, Senior Clinical Lecturer in Social and Community Psychiatry at University College London. More information on the study can be obtained from your local co-ordinator Dr David Osborn, Senior lecturer in psychiatry, UCL. d.osborn@medsch.ucl.ac.uk. 020 7794 0500 ext 33950/ 33718.