A no-win situation?: Managing risk in mental health practice

Dealing with issues of risk in mental health practice poses significant challenges to practitioners, managers and policy makers. The challenges of risk are both pragmatic and ethical. We ask pragmatic questions in policy and practice terms such as:

- How can I best keep people safe?
- How can I reduce the potential for harm?

We ask ethical questions in policy and practice terms such as:

- What is the good thing to do?
- How do I proceed with a course of action when all options seem problematic?
- How can I address issues of risk for clients when I feel at risk as a practitioner?

Whilst attention is often directed towards how to practically manage the assessment and management of risk, fewer resources are directed towards supporting managers and practitioners to address and respond to the significant ethical and moral dilemmas that ‘risk work’ presents in everyday practice contexts. Arguably it is these complex matters that trouble practitioners and managers the most in their day-to-day work as they attempt to resolve the tensions and dilemmas that risks pose to clients, to others and to themselves. Pragmatic responses and ethical responses to risk do not always align, for example, a lack of resources results in an individual or family remaining vulnerable to harm. As the ‘inquiry culture’ grows in Australia, the sense of feeling ‘at risk’ as a practitioner is increasing, adding yet another layer of risks to be considered.

In this forum, you will have the opportunity to listen to and engage with Visiting Scholars Professor Jim Campbell from Goldsmiths, University of London, and Dr Anne-Maree Sawyer from La Trobe University in Melbourne. Professor Campbell and Dr Sawyer are leaders in mental health research that considers the ethical and moral challenges that ‘risk work’ demands of people in frontline positions. Hosted by Dr Sonya Stanford from the Social Work program at UTAS, the forum will be of particular benefit to managers and practitioners working across the health and human services sector, and also will be instructive to policy makers in the mental health field.

Venue and registration details coming soon!

Contact information for this event:
Dr Sonya Stanford
Social Work, School of Social Sciences, UTAS
E: Sonya.Stanford@utas.edu.au
T: 6324 3720

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