

## The impact of implementing Mental Health First Aid with prelicensure nursing students in rural Indiana

**Purpose:** The purpose of this initiative was to enhance mental health education for prelicensure nursing students with the use of the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) certification course. MHFA certification provides an action plan to address the acute needs of someone suffering from a mental health or substance abuse crisis (About Mental Health First Aid, 2020).

**Background and Significance:** Rural communities in the United States suffer significantly from a lack of mental health resources (Schroeder and Peterson, 2017). With a lack of mental health providers and community resources, police, Emergency Medical Service (EMS) providers, and nurses are often the first to provide care to someone experiencing a mental health crisis. It is critical that these first responders have appropriate training and evidence-based tools to keep both those at risk and themselves safe from harm. The MHFA program, originally created in Australia in 2001, is an evidence-based tool that describes how to safely approach and respond to someone in an acute mental health crisis.

**Method/procedures:** MHFA is an intense, 8-hour training that provides five key steps to implement with someone experiencing an acute mental health crisis. In other countries, MHFA training has been found to be an effective tool in increasing mental health literacy for participants as well as behaviors that demonstrate safe practices (Morgan, Ross, and Reavley, 2018). Indiana University Purdue University Columbus (IUPUC) made the decision to implement MHFA certification with junior level prelicensure nursing students. By providing this course, future nurses will have an evidence-based tool to safely respond to someone experiencing an acute mental health crisis.

**Major Outcomes:** The outcomes from this initiative will include additional preparation for nurses in the state of Indiana to respond to an acute mental health crisis. Ultimately, those in Indiana who suffer from mental illness will be treated safely and with more empathy as mental health awareness improves. Having an evidence-based tool will also provide reassurance to new nurses that their response to someone in a mental health crisis can improve the lives of those they serve (Morgan, Ross, and Reavley, 2018).

**Conclusions:** Many of the students at IUPUC have chosen to work in south-central Indiana to serve those in a predominantly rural setting. Increasing nursing student knowledge and awareness of mental health issues can ultimately assist the already limited number of psychiatric healthcare providers in rural Indiana by providing excellent, evidence-based care to one of our most vulnerable populations.

### References:

About Mental Health First Aid. Mental Health First Aid USA. Retrieved on July 28, 2020 from <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/about/>.

Morgan, A.J., Ross, A., and Reavley, N-J. (2018). Systematic review and meta-analysis of Mental Health First Aid training: Effects on knowledge, stigma, and helping behaviour. PLoS ONE 13(5), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0197102>.

Schroeder, S.M. and Peterson, M-L. (2017). Identifying variability in patient characteristics and prevalence of emergency department utilization for mental health diagnoses in rural and urban communities, 34, 369-376. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jrh.12282>.