

---

# **Nurses/Work Stress in Volatile Environments Some Strategies for Self Care**

Heather Pickard  
Program Director  
Victorian Nurses Health Program



# The Victorian Nurses Health Program

---

A confidential independent program for nurses and students of nursing experiencing health problems related to substance use; and to assist nurses to maintain mental health wellbeing;



# General Risk factors for nurses developing alcohol and other drug problems

---

- Work and study – related stress;
- Exposure to trauma;
- Family history;
- Belief that knowledge eliminates risk – “it won’t happen to me”;
- Fear of the ramifications of seeking help;
- Undeveloped opportunities for debriefing, reflection and peer supervision.

# General Risk Factors for Nurses Developing Burnout / Compassion Fatigue



---

- High personal / community expectations;
- Staffing levels - high patient/client demand;
- Managing patient trauma;
- Feeling unable to have an impact on workplace systems;
- Undeveloped opportunities for debriefing, reflection and peer supervision.

Abendroth & Flannery (2006)

Billeter-Koponen & Freden (2005)

Caldwell, Gill et al (2006)



# Nurses:

---

“ busy little golden  
hearted person (s)  
doing things for  
sick people”  
Sainsbury (1974, p  
23).





# Barriers to Reaching out for Help

---

- Doubts regarding management's HR processes;
- Fears regarding putting careers at risk;
- Uncomfortability with becoming a health care recipient /client;
- The stigma of identified substance abuse/mental health or not being seen as coping

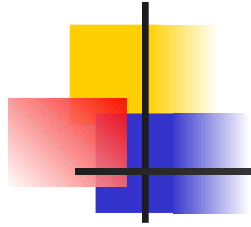
(Focus Group Outcomes 2005)



# Strategies for self care used at the VHNP

---

- Peer support groups providing opportunities to discuss experiences in work place
- Nurse lead initiate on developing diffusing techniques that can be used in work place to help each other
- Encouragement and information on more effective ways of communicating concerns of work place systems



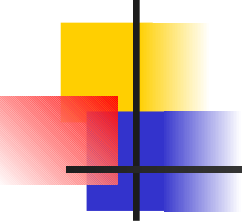
- Information sessions on early identification of stress and anxiety
- Structured sessions teaching techniques for relaxation/realism of influence
- Sessions designed to encourage dispelling of the myths that we should cope with everything or we are not good clinicians



# Assisting organisations to support staff with wellbeing

---

- Information sessions for Human Resources and management covering similar information as nurses receive
- Providing information to organisations on some ways to provide assistance to staff in areas of stress and burnout.

- 
- 
- Providing info on employee assistance systemic options available and the development of peer support programs
  - Providing input into the development of other healthy opportunities for staff within organizations
  - Referral options for staff effected



# Summary

---

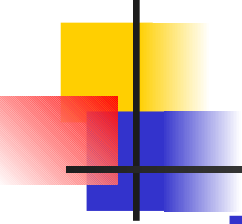
- VNHP believes this will prove to be a worthwhile model that will assist nurses in areas of self care and mental health wellbeing
- It could easily (if funding was available) be replicated in other professions in health or welfare areas
- NB Doctors already established 6 years ago.



## References that may be useful:

---

- Berryman C, (2002) Nurses Drug and Alcohol Use and Dependence: creating understanding Unpublished Thesis (PhD) University of Melbourne, School of Population Health
- Drug Impaired Professionals by Robert Holman Coombs published by Harvard University Press
- Dwyer D, Holloran P and Walsh K (2002) Why didn't I know? The reality of impaired nurses Connecticut Nursing News 2002 Mar-May; 75 (1) 20-22.
- Clark C (1999) Substance Abuse Among Nursing Students: Establishing a Comprehensive Policy and Procedure for Faculty Intervention *Nurse Educator* 24 (2) 16 – 19

- 
- 
- Holloran R and Rivellini C Nurses and Addiction Connecticut Nursing News (1999) 72 (4) 12-13
  - Haack M, Yocom C (2002) State Policies and Nurses with Substance Use Disorders *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 34 (1) 89 - 94
  - West M (2002) Early Risk Indicators of Substance Abuse Among Nurses *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 34 (2) 187 – 193
  - Sainsbury MJS (1974) Key To Psychiatry; a textbook for students Australia & New Zealand Book Co Pty Ltd Australia page 23