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ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MENTAL HEALTH ACT 2001

A.M. Doherty<sup>1</sup>, F. Jabbar<sup>2</sup>, B.D. Kelly<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Adult Psychiatry, Our Lady's Hospital, Navan, <sup>2</sup>Department of Adult Psychiatry, UCD/Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, Dublin, Ireland

Introduction: The Mental Health Act 2001 was implemented in November 2006 and its introduction has heralded many important changes in the provision of mental health care in Ireland.

Objectives: To examine the impact of the Act on the time and patterns of attention given to patients since its implementation, and to look at some of the difficulties encountered.

Aims: To propose amendments to the legislation, based on the experiences elicited.

Methods: This cross-sectional survey was conducted by questionnaire which we distributed along the chain of command in nursing management. They contained questions looking at attitudes to the Act and the resultant changes in nursing practise. The questionnaire also examined the levels of training with regard to the Act received by members of nursing staff. There was a space given for comments not encompassed by the questions.

Results: 317 questionnaires were returned. 56% of nursing staff believed that their workload had increased as a result of the change in legislation. Of those who made a comment, 76.5% were negative in relation to the new legislation, with increased paper work, lack of clarity and an excessive focus on legal technicalities being the most common difficulties reported.

Conclusion: Nursing staff have shown mixed attitudes to the Mental Health Act 2001. However, as a majority have reported a need for increased training, this is an important need which needs to be met.