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Engaging with lived dementia experience through first-person media narratives

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Having problems in communicating does not mean that individuals with dementia are unable to express themselves. Instead, we need to find ways to 'listen' more to what is being related. This presentation explores the learning potential of engaging mental health nurses with lived dementia experience through the accessing of media narratives. The narrative accounts are selected from a wide selection of media sources utilizing visual, textual and auditory modes of communication. These include internet blogs/discussion forums, autobiographical texts, art work, poetry, feature films and television documentaries. Subsequent learning was evaluated through focus group discussion and module assignments. The preliminary findings from these learning activities demonstrate a greater appreciation of lived dementia experience, including a person's thoughts and feelings. There was also a sense of attitudinal change reported with students more mindful of the internal world of those with dementia. This importantly helped participants to reframe behaviours which otherwise could be perceived as "challenging", recognizing internal drivers such as frustration, pain or helplessness. The work illustrated here highlights the need to facilitate expression of lived experience amongst those with dementia and for health care workers/learners to explore means of tuning in to and 'hearing' their narratives. The result of this is the promotion of attitudinal change, empathic learning and person centred care approaches as advocated by notable researchers such as Tom Kitwood and the Bradford Dementia Group. This also reflects care approaches to care highlighted in the National Dementia Strategy (DOH 2009).

Biography

Gary Morris is a PhD student at the University of Huddersfield as well as being a mental health lecturer working at the University of Leeds. He leads the mental health nursing programme and runs modules which include "Lived experience in mental health" and "Media depictions of mental health." He is the author of a number of articles and textbooks concerned with dementia care, media narratives and lived mental health experience.

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