

R E V I E W

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Empowering mentally ill people A new health promotion challenge?

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ABSTRACT: During the past decades, psychiatric services have undergone a transition to community-based care systems. People who are mentally ill need to regain power over their own lives, since they have been disempowered, due to, in some cases, many years of institutionalisation. Psychosocial rehabilitation services should aim towards empowerment within the framework of the mental health promotion of each particular individual. This paper aims to offer a review of the literature concerned with the empowerment of mentally ill people and to present the benefits that empowered people gain. Research has demonstrated that empowerment among mentally ill people offers life satisfaction. Mentally ill people are in need of a rehabilitation model that encourages their empowerment, by emphasising the goals defined by them. Empowerment may refer to both outcome and process, that is, not only to the outcome of the decisions an individual makes, but also to the essential feeling of being an active participant in the decision-making process. Patient empowerment is a matter of self-determination, hence, it occurs when a patient freely chooses his or her own path to recovery and well-being. It has been concluded that mentally ill people living within the community should not be treated as mere passive objects of medical interventions. Thus, empowerment should be a well-established part of mental health care and the base of psychosocial rehabilitation services. Nurses, in association with other health care professionals, should develop and implement adequate interventional programmes, which facilitate decision-making skills and promote self-esteem. Furthermore, empowerment sets new challenges for the nurses' education and it should, therefore, be the subject of studies in order to test the impact of empowerment interventions and to develop future practice within the scope of the psychosocial rehabilitation of mentally ill people.

KEY-WORDS: Mentally ill people, empowerment, health promotion