MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Preventing aggressive incidents and seclusions in forensic care by means of the ‘Early Recognition Method’

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Objective. The Early Recognition Method aims at improving collaboration between nurses and patients to prevent aggression in forensic psychiatric care. To achieve this goal, Early Recognition Method strongly focuses on early signs of aggression. In the current study, we investigated whether application of Early Recognition Method led to a significant decrease in inpatient incidents.

Background. Nurses in forensic settings are often confronted with patients’ aggression. Better collaboration between nursing staff and patients may improve patients’ ability to self-manage aggression and contribute to a decrease in inpatient aggression. Design. Naturalistic one-way case-crossover design.

Methods. The Early Recognition Method was introduced on 16 wards of a maximum security forensic hospital. Using a one-way case-crossover design, where cases were their own controls, the effects of Early Recognition Method were assessed by comparing the number of incidents of 189 patients during ‘Treatment As Usual’ with the period after Early Recognition Method was implemented. The Early Recognition Method intervention involved weekly evaluations of signs of aggression between staff and patients. The outcome measures were the number of seclusions and the severity of inpatient incidents.

Results. A significant decline in the number of seclusions was observed after Early Recognition Method was introduced. Apart from this decrease, the mean severity of inpatient incidents was also found to be lower during the post intervention period. The effect size was most pronounced for patients with substance abuse and personality disorders. Patients with schizophrenia, however, showed modest yet significant effect sizes.

Conclusions. The results suggest that Early Recognition Method may be an innovative and effective risk management method for forensic psychiatric patients, in particular for patients with personality disorders.

Relevance to clinical practice. This article aims to contribute to evidence-based risk management for nurses in collaboration with their patients, resulting in a decrease in inpatient aggression.

Key words: early signs, forensic mental health nursing, nurses, personality disorder, risk management

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Introduction

Nurses working in forensic settings run a high risk of being confronted with inpatient violence. Such violence can sub-

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