



Within 33 years of nursing in Yorkshire UK and in Australia I have seen many changes in approach to Forensic Mental Health and a varied and inconsistent reaction from mental health workers. After experiencing 8 years in direct primary care of patients with a forensic status I have recognised how complicated and challenging providing appropriate and effective care can be. The external issues interfering with delivery of care can be as complicated as the internal world of the forensic patient experiencing a mental illness.

For an individual the impact of the index offence and the subsequent not guilty finding can create an ongoing dilemma, at times unresolved as the acceptance of their mental illness is conditional on their understanding of the verdict. This is often further complicated by little or no insight into their illness and can impact significantly on effective progress. The culture of prison is counterproductive with the attitudes transferring to the health setting increasing suspicion and resistance to cooperation with health service professionals.

Health professionals despite a compassionate approach can have difficulties interacting with patients who have committed serious crimes, likewise the service can find it difficult to manage and appropriately place high risk patients. Prior to changes in the act recommendations by the Mental Health Review Tribunal took considerable time to be considered by the Minister for Health, this led to issues in planning and understandable frustrations for the patient. Radical changes in the process have now been made and although progressive bring its own unique challenges.

Despite these difficulties the rewards can be equally as satisfying. To effectively participate in a patient's rehabilitation who has been almost totally removed from the activities we all take for granted can be a rewarding experience. Walking beside them through this learning curve to successful living in the community is a unique experience in health care.

Within this climate of change and challenge education and professional development is essential. The UNSW Forensic Mental Health Masters has effectively promoted changes in my application of care and an advanced understanding of risk assessment I would recommend this course for anyone in the field of forensic health.