

Ms. Carol Essenmacher

Ms. Essenmacher: Hello. My name is Carol Essenmacher. I've been a registered nurse for over 21 years, primarily working in the mental health field. And one issue that I want to call to light to have some advocacy and impact on is front line mental health care workers.

Oftentimes in the three facilities that I have worked in we have a ratio of RNs to nursing assistant front line staff workers, and they -- the training level for people to deal with mental health care clients is minimal, at best. Oftentimes they are untrained in therapeutic interactions with patients and with problem resolution.

The professional staff are there and interact with the patient, write orders and that, but the people that are there 24/7 carrying out orders and interacting with patients are -- oftentimes have very little training.

I'd like to see some standardization and requirements for training for front line mental health care workers. It's kind of a you-get-what-you-pay-for kind of thing.

You know, we have to ask ourselves whether we want mental health care patients to be warehoused or whether we want for there to be therapeutic interactions with patients on an ongoing basis, irregardless of whether the doctor is there or not. And that's all I've got.

Ms. Olszewski: Thank you Carol. When you talk about standardized training, are you talking about it for both nursing staff as well as other front line workers? I was trying to understand exactly who you exactly wanted to aim this at?

Ms. Essenmacher: I was primarily speaking to the nonprofessional staff, although I think in nursing schools, speaking from personal experience, we have a very brief exposure to mental health care training. Emphasis is on documentation and nursing care plans and treatment planning and stuff like that, and there is not a lot of time devoted to that therapeutic -- developing therapeutic interactions.

So, yes, there needs to be more on a professional nursing standardization but definitely on front care mental health care workers.