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Hello

I currently manage an under 65 acute mental health unit in Fife. I have some concerns regarding what appears to be a double standard regarding patients with mental health problems. The need for someone to smoke, and not be able to, can be as distressing for a patient in a surgical ward as in a mental health wards. Patients with mental health problems have been arguing for years that they should have the same rights as everyone else, and quite rightly so, but this also means having the same responsibilities as everyone else.

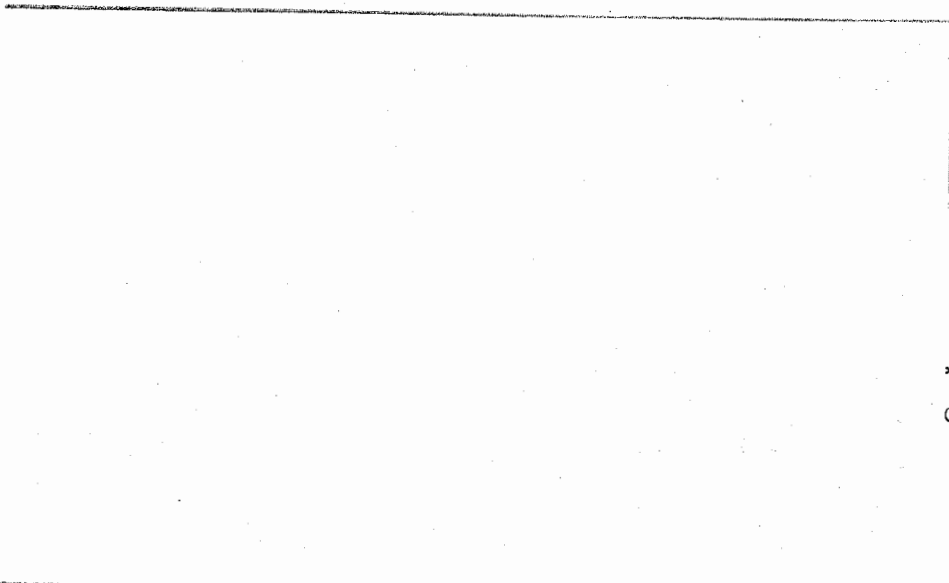
Mental health nurses are exposed to passive smoking on a daily basis in situations which are not within their control. They must observe patients at close quarters, due their observation plans, and have no choice at present but to place themselves in that position. There is a suggestion that those staff who smoke could carry out these duties but that is quite unrealistic given the staffing levels and also suggests that some staff should be more compromised than others due to their personal habits. A dangerous stance to take as it can be applied to many other situations.

There is also a double standard regarding health promotion. We have been encouraging staff to stop smoking and this has been very successful locally but they are then subjected to passive smoking when they return to work. I do not believe that this is an acceptable stance to take. Patients should not be allowed to smoke on any health premises and support can be offered to help them stop smoking. No individual group of people should be treated as being different as this leads to discrimination and in this instance I believe is patronising to the individuals concerned.

I think it is a matter of time before the health board is challenged as an employer for putting their staff at risk by placing them in a position to be exposed to passive smoking daily at their place of work.

I hope my initial views are of some help

Regards



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