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Citizen Trainers Engage with Nursing and Midwifery Students



By Johanna McMullan, Nursing and Midwifery



September 2018 students at the Injured Exhibition Display in the MBC after their WAVE tutorials.

'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland resulted in the immediate death of some 3,800 people with estimates in excess of 40,000 having suffered severe injury. In addition, an indeterminate number of the citizenry suffered significant and ongoing psychological and subclinical symptoms as a consequence of the extremes of civil unrest.

The legacy of 'The Troubles' is further reflected in disproportionately high levels of antisocial behaviour, family dysfunction, drug and alcohol dependency within the province (Wave 2014). WAVE, as an organisation, was formed in the early 1990s and is a cross-community voluntary organisation offering care and support to anyone bereaved, or suffering trauma or injury as a result of the violent civil conflict. Following the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, the 'conflict' related incidents have significantly diminished.

As most of the student nurses were born after this time, they are less likely to understand what impact 'the Troubles' had on society in Northern Ireland.

A significant number of patients and clients that current nursing students will be attending to in the course of their nursing and midwifery training or subsequent to qualification, may present with primary or secondary conditions associated with their experiences of the conflict. Many of the students will be drawn from social and geographical areas previously impacted by 'The Troubles'. Therefore, a joint educative initiative between the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Queen's and WAVE was established to better inform nursing and midwifery students of the skills, knowledge and context required in working with those who have experienced trauma directly or indirectly as a result of the Northern Ireland conflict. As co-educators, WAVE delivered a core lecture (augmented by online material), which was then followed by tutorials with nursing and midwifery students. The tutorials



Susan Carlisle and Johanna McMullan from the School of Nursing and Midwifery with Wave's patron, Jimmy Nesbitt.



Nursing students viewing the WAVE portrait exhibition.



A number of the citizen trainers with Grainne McKenna, Wave's Education Officer



were substantially led by those who had been involved with, and experienced, loss and trauma as a result of the conflict (Health Service users and carers) called Citizen Trainers and provided an opportunity to share their experience and their recollection of personal interactions with medical and nursing professionals. This year 'The Injured Exhibition' was also displayed in the MBC to coincide with the delivery of the WAVE tutorials to evoke discussion and raise awareness for all.

This approach is relatively unique in that it involves many of those directly involved and injured by "The Troubles" as "citizen trainers" and clearly reflects the School's policy of progressively engaging with users and carers of health services as co-educators to students. The potential benefits of such a co-educative approach is reflected in other studies (Rhodes, 2012; The Health Foundation McKay et al, 2009).

Delivery of this teaching by WAVE forms part of the final phase of first year teaching in the Health and Wellbeing module. This module addresses the context of health; the anatomy and physiology of the body and human health (Life Sciences) but also the psychological, social, health education and public health dimensions of nursing and midwifery and the context of care.

A paper which evaluated the WAVE teaching initiative from the students' perspective found the students rated the teaching extremely highly (McMullan et al, 2016). Students reporting that the sessions made a significant impact providing them with necessary skills to communicate effectively with survivors of the conflict and that they were now better furnished with the information as to how to signpost anyone in their care that they might encounter who is struggling with issues associated with the conflict. A second qualitative study found that Citizen Trainers overall found the initiative helped them, however it was with significant personal cost both physically and emotionally.

If nurses and midwives are to adequately respond to the existing and future needs of victims/survivors of the conflict in Northern Ireland, it is essential that they gain cultural competence by addressing issues of sectarianism within their training context (Coulter et al. 2012). From the volunteer's point of view, there is clearly a benefit in having nursing professionals with a knowledge and understanding of the effect of the conflict on health in a broad context of different communities in Northern Ireland. Benefits are also evident in terms of appreciating the impact on the health of individuals who are victims and survivors of the violence of this past. However, when embarking on such an initiative with users, carers, citizen trainers etc. one must be mindful that although it would seem the process does have benefits for those involved, there is a significant cost in terms of stress at the time and an emotional cost to them personally. All of those involved must be respectful, ensure there are robust preparations and anticipate for potential negative emotions and ensure they are addressed adequately.