

# **Better preparing RNs for the realities of the emergency department: Using simulation to enhance undergraduate learning across mental health and emergency nursing practice**

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Emergency department nurses do not always have confidence in their knowledge around management of acute mental health presentations. Gaps in mental health services provided continue to exist, in particular the accessibility of around the clock services.

Due to a range of factors, the need for the delivery of mental health services within the emergency department is increasing. While there have been some increases in the provision of specialist mental health care, these have not been made available across the sector, with a focus in larger metropolitan facilities. Today's nurses are more likely to need additional skills in dealing with issues that have traditionally been in the domain of the mental health nurse.

In order to improve the confidence and competence of nurses providing care to clients with mental health issues in the ED, the Southern Cross University Bachelor of Nursing has responded by introducing students to mental health throughout the entire undergraduate program while maintaining a core mental health unit. This culminates in a final unit of study which integrates acute mental health management with acute ED/critical care concepts as a reflection of current practice in Australian EDs, developed in collaboration between mental health and ED specialist nurses. A key objective of the unit is to better prepare all novice RNs in managing acute mental health presentations, specifically in the ED, but with skills and knowledge that is transferable across all areas of practice.

Based on Benner's novice to expert theory, undergraduate students are exposed to a range of high-fidelity high-technology simulation activities that incorporate both elements of acute emergency nursing practice and acute mental health intervention. This approach provides a safe environment for students to experience the realities of current clinical practice, and develop their skills in dealing with complex clinical challenges.