How useful are mental health declarations in student nurses?

Dr Susan Harvey, 2002

ABSTRACT

Following the Allitt Inquiry it became common practice to obtain General Practitioner completed mental health declarations in addition to self-completed declarations for student nurse recruits, and to assess sickness absence. The value of pre-employment health assessment has not been proven. The study aimed to determine the short-term value of mental health declarations by comparing outcome on a nurse-training course between students with a Positive Declaration (PD) of a past mental health problem and students with a Negative Declaration (ND), and to compare sickness absence of 699 students studied retrospectively, 55 had a PD with the following outcomes; 36 (65.5%) passed, 15 (27.3%) resigned, 2 (3.6%) were discontinued and 2 (3.6%) had unknown outcome. Of 644 with a ND, 492 (76.4%) passed, 102 (15.8% resigned, 33 (5.1%) were discontinued, 8 (1.2%) had unknown outcome, and 9 (1.4%) were excluded. Although the difference in the proportion of passes was not significant, p=0.09, the difference in resignations was, p=0.04 PD may predict resignation. Age and number of sick days were significantly negatively correlated, Rho = -0.273, p=0.01. Absence data were available for 28 of 36 (78%) PD cases and 482 of 492 (98%) ND cases that completed the course. In 5 (17.9%) PD cases and 128 (26.6%) ND cases absence was high. The difference was not significant (p=0.38); PD may not be associated with high sickness absence.

Key Words: Allitt Inquiry; mental-health; occupational health services; personnel selection; sick leave; personnel turnover