The Need for and Implementation of Compassion Building in Correctional Mental Healthcare

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Background

Lorain Correctional Institution (LORCI) is a carceral facility located in Grafton, Ohio and is owned and operated by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC). The facility has an incarcerated person (IP) population of roughly 1400 at any given time and has a staff of around 400 including officers, healthcare providers, and administrative staff.

Department of Rehabilitation & Correction

Population

- LORCI is a male-only minimum-security facility for IPs in Ohio.
- LORCI is one of two ODRC intake facilities, meaning that individuals who are entering ODRC are processed through LORCI regardless of security level and spend some amount of time in the facility before being processed out to their "parent institution" where they will remain incarcerated until their release.
- LORCI is also the facility for parole violators in the state, meaning that most individuals housed at LORCI at any given time are leaving within just a few months.

Activities

Overall responsibilities included:

- Facilitating mental health assessments, evaluations, treatment plan creation, mental health contacts, and more
- Documenting clinical encounters and discussing preliminary mental health diagnoses with supervisors considering biopsychosocial factors
- Touring, shadowing ODRC staff, and engaging in internal audits at other carceral institutions within ODRC
- Passively and actively engaging in review of policies and protocols impacting continuation of care in ODRC
- Assisting in the implementation of various mental health and prosocial events across the organization
- Independently studying compassion building in corrections and creating deliverables for reference by mental health staff

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Learning Objectives

- Apply awareness of cultural values and practices to the design or implementation of public health policies or programs
- Communicate audience-appropriate public health content, both in writing and through oral presentation
- Describe the importance of cultural competence in communicating public health content
- Perform effectively on interprofessional teams
- Apply systems thinking tools to a public health issue

Deliverable 1: Literature Review

- This literature review is a resource for mental health staff to create and maintain an up to date understanding of the need for compassion building in corrections, outlining the current state of mental healthcare in corrections and the impact of poor care on the health of IPs and clinicians alike.
- This review also acts as a foundation for beginning to understand methods for implementing compassion-focused therapy in correctional social work, providing additional resources for clinicians to reference in treatment planning and client interactions.

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Deliverable 2: Presentation for Mental Health Staff

- This presentation was a method of delivering the information regarding the need for and methods of implementing compassion building for the mental health staff at LORCI. Because of the demand of the work being done at LORCI, time and energy to review a lengthy literature review is limited, making a presentation an effective way of engaging staff.
- During this presentation we assessed mental health staff burnout utilizing the Maslach Burnout Inventory and discussed methods for building compassion with clients as well as self-compassion as a clinician to combat burnout.

Lessons Learned

- I learned how to write an impactful, audience-specific literature review, emphasizing important aspects and particularly useful resources for my audience
- I learned about the robust body of policies and protocols governing correctional social work and created an understanding of potential points of intervention for large-scale change
- I learned about balancing the importance of maintaining safety and security and the need to provide adequate mental healthcare when working with involuntarily-engaged populations
- I learned more about incorporating institutional and organizational impacts on the individual in my understanding of individual-level mental and physical health

Public Health Implications

Compassion building can lead to:

- Lower rates of anxiety, depression, substance use, and other mental health-related conditions among clinicians and IPs
  - Associated outcomes including increased self-esteem and self-worth, lower self-criticism, better job performance, and higher satisfaction with quality of care
- Better physical health outcomes including lower rates of infectious and chronic disease
- Reductions in violence, criminality, and recidivism among IPs, creating healthier and safer communities

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