



Abstract Nr: 209
Internet ID: 509

Type of Presentation: Oral Presentation

The role of mental health centres in navigating deranged spaces

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Learning Goal:

The mental health care reform in the Czech Republic is hoped to “humanize” the psychiatric practice by focusing on the development of community-based services. The presented research questions processes in developing community outreach services and explore how an empowerment-based practice can be cultivated rather than reproductions of total institution practice.

Abstract Text:

The presentation will discuss current developments of the community mental health care in a larger Czech city in the context of an ongoing psychiatric care reform. The reform aspires to “reorganize” and “humanize” the psychiatric care by means of establishing a network of mental health centres providing community outreach care to people diagnosed with severe mental illness. Community-based care is not new to mental health field in the country, however so far it has been developed mostly within the social work context, far away from the medical care. Now the worlds of social work and medical care are starting to cooperate thoroughly. However, professionals from both backgrounds worry that their perspective may be put aside. Despite the reform documents using words such as “recovery” or “empowerment” some professionals as well as some people with SMI diagnoses also worry that practices known from psychiatric hospitals will prevail and community-based care become an extended hospital reaching as far as home.

Ethnographic research in a new centre will be discussed. We will mostly focus on the experience of its team members. It will be shown how they deal with autonomy of their clients, with sharing, supporting or overtaking responsibility. How do they frame their decisions in this context? For instance, based on what assumptions are the clients supported to work or take disability pensions? Yet in big cities the importance of autonomy for mental health recovery may be lessened by the experience of loneliness. Therefore we also have to ask how does the team manage to support connectedness and a sense of belonging to the community. It will be discussed how the centre itself is interweaving with a life of the city and also whether it's members are managing to meaningfully invite the lived experience to their daily practice.

**ON THE HEALING POWER
OF HUMAN RECONNECTION**