

## Supervision and primary care nursing

Supervision that is supportive and helps to solve specific problems  
can improve performance, job satisfaction and motivation

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Supervision is a professional development activity that can help ensure ethical, quality services are provided to people using health services. However there are many definitions and types of supervision and there is no “one size fits all” which will suit all workers, disciplines, roles, managers and leaders and health care services.

Supervision types will have to be tailored to fit the organisation and to meet the needs of the practitioner. In many cases the way supervision is applied within an organisation depends on the nature of the work and the regulations that govern the way members of a particular profession must practice. Supervision in primary care settings can be an effective strategy for developing the nursing workforce and also for improving services for people experiencing mental health and addiction problems.

## PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT FOR PRIMARY CARE NURSES

*This story appeared in the Autumn 2014 edition of Handover, a quarterly newsletter from Te Pou for mental health and addiction nurses. Subscribe to Handover at [www.tepou.co.nz/subscribe](http://www.tepou.co.nz/subscribe).*

Access to regular quality practice development support for primary care nurses was one of the keys to the success of a mental health and addiction credentialing programme developed by primary health organisation (PHO) Manaia Health in Northland. The mental health and addiction credential is offered by Te Ao Māramatanga (New Zealand College of Mental Health Nurses), see [www.nzcmhn.org.nz/credentialing](http://www.nzcmhn.org.nz/credentialing).

Practice development support in this context was delivered in the form of group peer supervision of which the focus is to assist primary care nurses with translation of knowledge and skills into practice.

Mary Carthew, associate director of nursing primary health care at Manaia Health, and John Hartigan, primary mental health co-ordinator, could see much value in supporting primary care nurses and set up the education component of the programme to increase their mental health and addiction knowledge and skills to respond to people in their local communities.

One of the initial steps was to find supervisors with specialist mental health and addiction knowledge and skills. “This required some planning and negotiation between the nurse leaders from the local DHB and our PHO,” said Mary. “One of the biggest challenges was to set up a form of supervision that could be regularly accessed by nine primary care nurses working in different organisations across a large rural area.”

Two local experienced supervisors, Bart van Gaalen and Henritee de Vries, who were registered nurses from the local mental health and addiction services, were contracted to provide practice development support in the form of group peer supervision.

The programme ran for six months and included six education days that were delivered by a range of local specialists with mental health and addiction knowledge. During the programme many professional relationships were created. Not only did the nurses build relationships with local specialists who provided the education, but the strength of their relationships grew as a group.

Practice development support sessions occurred fortnightly on Thursdays between 5.30pm and 7pm, in a venue provided by the PHO. The sessions were a time of professional and personal growth and had a balanced blend of learning, reflecting, and laughing.

To structure the sessions the supervisors used the Collegial Consultation Incident Method tool, which Bart and Henritee had adapted.

**The tool included four phases:**

1. information about a problem
2. forming an opinion
3. solving the problem
4. evaluation.

The fortnightly sessions provided a safe environment for nurses to share how they were integrating their new knowledge into practice. Te Pou met with two of the nurses on the programme. Judith Hall, a registered general nurse employed by Northtec as a student health nurse, completed the programme alongside her colleague Jann Leaming. Judith found the process of learning together with a colleague invaluable given they both worked in an isolated practice setting.

Judith found the group peer supervision sessions very useful. “The complementary styles of Bart and Hen worked well... they were the right fit... they demystified supervision for me... learning about the tool and how we could use this to focus our sessions was really helpful. In each session we began with a round of checking in to see ‘what was on top’ for each of us so we could discuss any burning issues.”

Suzanne Mackay, a practice nurse, found the forum of group supervision enabled her to build relationships with the other nurses on the programme and made it much easier to feel able to pick up the phone to discuss any issues arising in practice. It was a time of learning to be vulnerable, learning to trust, having a willingness to be critiqued and growing in confidence.

*The skills and style of the supervisors were keys to the success of the supervision experience for the nurses.*

Suzanne's comments echo Judith's. "The supervisors were a great resource of knowledge... had a great sense of humour... sessions were enjoyable and not a burden... it was a good social time and a time of learning and reflection... the tool kept our discussion on track and focused... the sessions enabled us to keep our learning at the forefront... the supervisors modelled how to be effective mental health and addiction nurses.

"In each session there was an opportunity for us all to discuss a practice issue and then discuss how we dealt with it and then answer questions and receive feedback from the group. The size of the group was small enough to enable us to get the most out of the sessions."

**Suzanne's key messages to other primary nurses engaging in practice development support are:**

- engage in the whole process
- do your presentation
- reflect on your practice
- keep your eyes and ears open
- process your learning
- bring good topics to the sessions.

The positive experience of practice development support in the form of group peer supervision coupled with the tool convinced this group of primary care nurses this is something that they would like to continue with as part of the re-credentialing process for the programme. To that end they have set up a regular time to meet and continue to grow and learn as a group of primary health care mental health and addiction credentialed nurses.

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## RESOURCES

*To support the development and sustainment of effective and supportive supervision for the mental health and addiction workforce, Te Pou has developed a suite of resources. These resources also have relevance to organisations where employees are engaged in some form of supervision.*

### PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION & NURSING

**The professional supervision guide for nursing supervisees (Te Pou, 2011).** This guide is designed for nurses who are new to supervision. It outlines key issues to be aware of when beginning your professional supervision relationship and how to participate in professional supervision. It identifies the different kinds of supervision.

**The professional supervision guide for nursing supervisors (Te Pou, 2011).** This guide is designed for experienced mental health nurses who are either new to the role of supervisor, or are already supervisors but want a more technical understanding of their roles and responsibilities. This guide should be used to enhance supervision training for nurses.

## SUPERVISION AND THE MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SUPPORT WORKFORCE

**Position paper: the role of supervision in the mental health and addiction support workforce** (Te Pou, 2013). This resource outlines how supervision can support and assist the support workforce in providing effective, safe and quality services for people using mental health and addiction services. Case studies showing how supervision for support workers is provided in nine non-government organisations are described. A diagram outlining the types of supervision and other professional development activities is also included.

## SUPERVISION AND ADDICTION PRACTITIONERS, SUPERVISORS AND MANAGERS

**Aronui. Supervision guide for addiction practitioners, supervisors and managers** (dapaanz, 2014). This resource developed in collaboration with dapaanz (The Addiction Practitioners' Association, Aotearoa-New Zealand) and Matua Raki (National Addiction Workforce Development Centre) is tailored to dapaanz registered addiction practitioners and those supervising and managing dapaanz registered addiction practitioners. This guide provides general information about supervision and has sections for supervisors, supervisees and managers. Content has relevance for other workforce groups. Templates of forms related to supervision are available to download. A section on 'Supervision and Māori' and 'cultural supervision' is included.

## SUPERVISION AND MANAGERS

**Supervision guide for mental health and addiction kaiwhakahaere/ managers** (Te Pou, 2015). This guide provides general guidelines to ensure organisations and the community they serve have the benefit of effective supervision. It provides information about how to set up, review and evaluate a structured supervision process, and overviews the different requirements of the different professions that may be part of a team. Templates to support the guide are also available. A section on supervision requirements by profession, guidance on how to cultivate supervisors and a checklist for managers to assist with their review of supervision processes is included.

**The professional supervision guide for nursing leaders and managers** (Te Pou, 2011). This guide helps leaders and managers of nurses to implement professional supervision from an organisational perspective. It defines the responsibilities of the organisation and how professional supervision can be implemented within an organisation.

## COACHING

If you have a coaching role in your organisation then the ***Let's get real: Disability Coaching guide*** may also be of interest to you. While written with the disability sector in mind, it is a good generic guide that outlines the role of a coach, qualities of a good coach, some do's and don'ts and provides some models for coaches to use. A great reminder that coaching is a key part of performance development and management of employees.

All resources can be found in the resource centre of the Te Pou website, [www.tepou.co.nz](http://www.tepou.co.nz).

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