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Mental health: Consumer and Carer involvement essential

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Press Release: Royal Australian and NZ College of Psychiatrists

Consumer and Carer involvement essential to improving mental health

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists is pleased to announce that it has appointed a consumer and carer representative to its governing body in acknowledgement of the importance of consumer and carer involvement in mental health care.

“A community member representative has joined The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists’ governing body, General Council, as an observer. Such a positive step forward will greatly assist consumer and carer integration into broader College activities, policies and processes,” said Dr Maria Tomasic, President of The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists.

“The College is a leader amongst Australasian medical colleges in developing partnerships with consumers, family and other carers. The General Council aims to work together with the new community member representative in achieving the best attainable quality of psychiatric care and mental health for the community,” said Dr Tomasic.

“Community members should be key stakeholders in mental health and the College encourages genuine consumer and carer engagement whereby the needs, perspectives, concerns and values of consumers, their carers and families help influence clinical practice, College activity and government policy,” said Dr Tomasic.

“Consumer and carer participation is actively encouraged within the College structure and decision making processes. Engaging a range of consumers and carers on College boards and committees and reference groups enables opportunity for their perspectives to influence quality initiatives such as policy, planning, and the training of psychiatry registrars and continuing education of College members,” said Dr Tomasic.

“Community members, including Indigenous members, sit on a broad range of College boards and committees Their involvement as full members of these bodies has increased to include all the key decision making bodies within the College,” said Dr Tomasic.

The College’s newly appointed community member representative Mr Jim Crowe said, “Having a community member representative on the College’s General Council enables consumers and carers to bring their lived experience to the council table, providing an alternative perspective. It is very important that mental health professionals and the College listen to the opinion of community members as the consumer and carer experience can be very different to that of the clinician,”.

“I thank the College for having the wisdom to elect a community member onto its governing body so that for the first time the community view is able to support the College in the valuable work it does. It is tremendous to have a community voice at long last in the appropriate place,” said Mr Crowe.

“Psychiatrists are encouraged to work in partnership with consumers and their carers so they have the opportunity to

plan, monitor and influence their ongoing treatment in clinical practice. Working in partnership provides consumers access to quality information which assists their decision making and supports an active role for consumers in managing their own health. Research indicates that consumers who are involved in the management of their care experience better health outcomes. Similarly, research shows that carer involvement at this level provides better health outcomes for consumers,” said Dr Tomasic.

“The College acknowledges and supports the role consumers and carers play in influencing the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of mental health services at all levels of government. Their contribution to policy development and in general, their assistance in setting key priorities to address quality and safety issues in the delivery of mental health services is essential,” said Dr Tomasic.

“Consumers of mental health services and their carers have a great deal of experience and expertise that clinicians, the College, mental health service providers, policy makers and government are able to draw upon,” said Dr Tomasic.

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