



PhD Thesis

***FACULTY OF HEALTH & MEDICINE
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE & PUBLIC HEALTH***

**Improving Doctor-Patient Communication: Evaluation of a communication skills
training program for psychiatry**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Medicine

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Scholarship

Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision. The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo.

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By signing below I confirm that Philippa Ditton-Phare contributed a large proportion to the published systematic review within this thesis and, as such, she is first author on this publication. She undertook the literature search and review, set up and managed the systematic review in Covidence, jointly conducted the screening and quality assessment with other authors, wrote up the initial draft of the paper, and finalised the publication with input from the other authors. This contribution was to the paper/publication entitled "*Communication skills in the training of psychiatrists: A systematic review of current approaches*", published in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 51(7), 675-692. doi: 10.1177/0004867417707820.

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Full ethics and site approval for studies in this thesis has been obtained from the Hunter New England Health Research Ethics Committee.

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

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2. Ditton-Phare, P., Halpin, S., Sandhu, H., Kelly, B., Vamos, M., Outram, S., Bylund, C.L., Levin, T., Kissane, D., Cohen, M., & Loughland, C. (2015). Communication skills in psychiatry training. *Australasian Psychiatry*, 23(4), 429-31. doi: 10.1177/1039856215590026
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4. Kissane, D., Ditton-Phare, P., Loughland, C. (2019). Communication and relational skills in medicine. In L. Grassi, M. Riba, & T. Wise (Eds.), *Person Centred Approach to Recovery in Medicine. Integrating Psychiatry and Primary Care*. Springer: Cham. doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-74736-1_9

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Explanation
AMEE	International Association for Medical Education
BPAD	Bipolar Affective Disorder
BPD	Borderline Personality Disorder
CCS	ComSkil Coding System
CST	Communication Skills Training
CIPP	Context / Input / Process / Product model
DAS-O	Decision Analysis System for Oncology
DOPS	Direct Observation of Procedural Skills
ECCS	Empathic Communication Coding System
EPA	Entrustable Professional Activity
ETOH	Alcohol Use Disorder (Ethanol)
FEC	Formal Education Course
GPA	Goals, Plans and Actions theory
HNELHD	Hunter New England Local Health District
HNEMHS	Hunter New England Mental Health Service
HNET	Hunter New England Training (in psychiatry)
KAAS	Karmanos Accrual Analysis System
MAAS	Maastricht History-Taking and Advice Checklist
MDD	Major Depressive Disorder
Mini-CEX	Mini Clinical Evaluation Exercise
MIPS	Medical Interaction Process System

NAAS	Nonverbal Accommodation Analysis System
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NSW	New South Wales
OCA	Observed Clinical Activity
OCD	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
OSCE	Objective Structured Clinical Examination
RANZCP	Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
REML	Restricted Maximum Likelihood
RIAS	Roter Interaction Analysis System
SAS	Statistical Analysis System
SCCAP	Siminoff Communication Content and Affect Program
SP	Simulated Patient
SPA	Standardised Patient Assessment
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
Sz	Schizophrenia
TA	Thematic Analysis
UK	United Kingdom
UON	University of Newcastle
USA	United States of America
VR-CODES	Verona Coding Definitions of Emotional Sequences

Abstract

Doctor-patient communication is an area of significant focus. For decades, patients experiencing severe mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia), along with their families and carers, have expressed a desire for better communication and information about illness diagnosis, prognosis and treatment. Evidence from other medical specialties (e.g., oncology) show that specific and targeted communication skills can be acquired through communication skills training (CST), translate to clinical practice, and improve patient outcomes. However, in psychiatry, and Australia specifically, there are significant gaps in specialist postgraduate CST programs, and it is largely unknown whether psychiatry-specific CST would translate into psychiatric practice or improve experiences for mental health patients. This issue is particularly important to health service providers, medical educators and policy makers, who need to see a return on training investment, in terms of both skill translation to clinical practice and improved experiences for service end-users. This thesis draws together a systematic review of the research literature highlighting the need for psychiatry-specific CST, and reports on the development of an Australia-based psychiatry-specific program called ComPsych. Qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used to build on previous feasibility and utility research for ComPsych and extend this work in a larger sample, and examine how skills learned in the classroom actually transfer to the workplace, what skills were retained over time, and whether patient experiences were positively affected by the training. Results confirmed the utility and feasibility of the program, that process tasks, strategies and certain skills (e.g., agenda setting) were transferred to psychiatric practice, maintained for up to 18 months, and patients' satisfaction with their treatment and doctors' patient-centred interactions increased. This thesis demonstrates that investment by Health

Services in CST for psychiatrists is beneficial, improves confidence and skills in psychiatry trainees and improves the care experiences for patients.