

As a registered nurse working on a locked adult acute psychiatric inpatient unit, I use Trauma First Aide skills every day on myself, colleagues and patients in my professional setting. I have learned to track and respond appropriately to the highly dysregulated nervous systems of the clients I work with leading to significant reductions in use of seclusion and restraint, antipsychotic administration, injuries to staff and patients, documentation, and staffing and overtime needs.

I am especially proud that the mental health technicians I work with have learned to track and respond appropriately to the highly dysregulated nervous systems of our patients. Specifically, the technicians, with keen awareness, now look for the “polar bear breath” in patients that often follows disruptive, aggressive or threatening behaviors. With the understanding that the deep breath indicates the nervous system is settling, we ourselves have been able to remain calm, thus reducing our reactivity to alarming conduct and have eliminated the use of seclusion and mechanical restraints with patients on our unit since I received Trauma First Aide Training.

Using Trauma First Aide skills in an acute inpatient psychiatric setting has resulted in changes in the milieu acknowledged by administrators, front-line staff and patients. Administrators are pleased regarding the decline in restraint use; staff are relieved that the unit is “peaceful”; and patients often remark that they feel safe, seen and heard when we are working. I wholeheartedly recommend Trauma First Aide training to mental health workers.

The experiential learning that Dr. Everett and her associates facilitate during TFA training is highly effective and long-lasting. Through the practice of calming my nervous system and sustaining my equilibrium throughout highly activating events, I have become more effective and satisfied with my delivery of compassionate and quality care to mental health patients.

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