

# Though noble, NMC's standards are an assault on mental health nursing.

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# NMC proficiency standards are an assault on mental health nursing

Interpreted by higher education institutions, the NMC's standards has led to an education postcode lottery – to the detriment of specialist teaching

The Nursing and Midwifery Council's (NMC) Standards of Proficiency for Registered Nurses have noble aims, yet their impact has been an assault on mental health nursing as a distinct specialism.

Outnumbered in the profession as a whole, mental health nursing has often been undervalued and misunderstood, and the idea of what it means to be a nurse is becoming synonymous with that of general adult nursing. 'Generic' nurse education is not truly generic.

While the NMC set standards, these are then interpreted by higher education institutions (HEIs). This has led to a postcode lottery with HEIs offering different depth of mental health content. However, most have opted to increase their generic content to the detriment of specialist mental health teaching.

The practice assessment document is mismatched with the job people will do, resembling a physical health skill tick box rather than a measure of mental health nursing skills. There is no great mental health nursing refusal to improve physical health skills, yet this has not been contextualised, and students are learning skills they will not need or use.

Mental health nurses use psychiatric diagnosis while recognising its limitations, develop close relationships to help people make sense of their distress, and deal with some of the most delicate ethical issues across nursing.

We work with complex legislation relating to human rights and need a deep understanding of power dynamics, particularly as we work with

many people who have experienced psychological trauma. You cannot have your cake and eat it. You cannot make training more generic and produce graduates with necessary specialist knowledge to do this job well.

If our society is comfortable with increasing genericism, then we are saying it is okay to lower our expectations for good quality mental healthcare. It is high time that as a profession we stand up and take notice before we are gone forever. Not for us, but for the people in need of mental healthcare.

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