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Suicide in Hospitals and Prisons: An analysis of New South Wales Coronial Reports (2012-2018)

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There is a paucity of studies into the causal factors associated with suicides¹ while in custodial care in hospitals and prisons. Much of the existing research is orientated towards understanding risk factors and patient and prisoner demographics. Despite inpatient suicide consistently being one of the leading sentinel events² in the Australian healthcare system and a significant burden in the correction services, it is often viewed as unpredictable and thus largely unpreventable.

The aim of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of how and why suicides in hospitals and prisons occur and whether they are truly unpredictable and thus unpreventable. This study will improve the understanding of the complex interplay of causal factors; both system and individual, involved in suicides of individuals in custodial care in hospitals and prisons.

My research uses The Human Factors Analysis and Classification (HFACS) system designed by Wiegmann & Shappell (2003) and conceptually based on Reason's Swiss cheese model of human error and accident causation (1990), to map the trajectory of completed suicides in the hospital and prison population. Data has been obtained from publicly available coronial reports in New South Wales (NSW) from the years 2012-2018 inclusive. Using HFACS as an analytical framework allows the identification of both individual and system causal factors implicated in the completed suicides, which is essential in understanding the link between human factors and suicides in custodial care. The results of this study will provide an evidence base for developing strategies to increase safety in these institutions and contribute to the growing research supporting human factor analysis in healthcare.

Reference:

1. A death caused by self-inflicted measures, where the intent is known or where the lethality of the method chosen was more than likely to cause death
2. A subset of adverse events which result in serious patient harm or death and reflect a serious breakdown in healthcare processes and systems.

Biography:

Penelope Sweeting is a 1st year academic working in the College of Nursing as a Lecture in Nursing (Clinical) and has extensive clinical experience in critical care and emergency. Penelope is currently investigating suicides in prison and hospitals using a human factors analysis approach. Penelope's publications include an editorial accepted by Nursing Children and Young People in February 2018 titled Paediatric pain management the painful truth. Penelope's qualifications include a Bachelor of Nursing from the University of Technology Sydney Australia, a Graduate Certificate in Acute Care Nursing from the University of New England and a Master of Advanced Nursing, where she majored in management, also from the University of Technology.