

ANZPATH 2017 - Finding a new narrative

Presenting author: Ange Morgan is presenting from the perspective of a community member. Ange is also a registered art therapist, working with adult populations in the mental health sector and has a special interest in the area and art therapy and homelessness.

Title: *An experience of transition in Australia: The role of time and the client/psychiatrist relationship in supporting clarity, mental preparation and arising themes pre and post surgery.*

Abstract: This paper explores the experience, arising themes, post op reflections and perceived outcome within the process of engaging with psychiatric assessment and consultation for top surgery, from the presenter's own perspective. The paper draws upon reflective journal notes and visual art work created to heuristically explore, support and understand aspects of self through this process of transition.

The paper highlights questions about what components enable or restrict a client's ability to engage openly and willingly with the process of psychiatric assessment and consultation pre and post surgery, and how culture might influence attitudes to this required process.

The requirement to attend at least 3 sessions with a psychiatrist in Australia to obtain a letter allowing for top surgery has been viewed at times, anecdotally within the community, as frustrating or oppressive. For many people, accessing the services of a psychiatrist still connect to a deficit, to 'something being wrong', and to a perceived power imbalance between doctor and patient. This paper presents an experience of value for this required process, a new narrative, through the identification of aspects that were important to the presenter within this contemporary consultation space.

In this example, initial frustration at the wait times between psychiatrist consultations soon became valued, as it became evident that alongside the urgency to obtain top surgery, there was also a need to clarify aspects of rationale and self that took time. Many themes emerged during the process of assessment and consultation which required time to contemplate and clarify. Time provided the opportunity for extensive reflection, and for lived experience of and with the questions posed within the psychiatric consultations.

Within the client/psychiatrist relationship, valued aspects included a sense of equal participation in the process, and recognition of the client's own strengths and knowledge. Space for the client's thoughts, feelings and unique experiences of their own gender identity to be heard and explored allowed an experience of validation and safety which was highly inclusive. The provision of clear information regarding procedural, medical, legal and psychological aspects of the process, alongside the psychiatrist / provider's interest in and care for their area of specialty was felt to assist this client to make clear decisions and to feel safe.

Arising themes post surgery became both valuable and important to resolve within the professional space provided by the psychiatrist. These were in some cases unexpected. The process of ongoing consultation post surgery allowed for a structured and reflective space to hold and explore the arising material, in a way that was active and transformative.