On December 15 2013, Queensland Health decided to introduce a policy that required the main entry and exit doors to all acute mental health inpatient units throughout the State to be locked. The stated purpose of the new policy is to prevent absconding of involuntary patients, thus reducing the risk of self-harm and harm to others. In this context, voluntary patients and involuntary patients with leave entitlements should maintain their right to leave the ward (Director of Mental Health, 2013).

In light of the introduction of the new policy, the Queensland Mental Health Commissioner commissioned our team to undertake a project regarding least restrictive practices in acute mental units in Queensland. The project had two distinct phases: a literature review and a series of facilitated forums.

The purpose of this project is to provide a review of the literature on the elements (e.g., legislation, leadership, governance, human resources, workforce, education, training, funding, physical infrastructure, policies, programs, practices and processes) necessary to move towards a least restrictive environment in acute mental health inpatient units in Queensland, particularly in relation to the debate about locked or unlocked facilities. A second aim of the project is to facilitate discussion with consumers, families, carers, support persons and clinical staff regarding the extent to which those system elements are in place in Queensland.

The presentation will discuss the recommendations made as a result of the literature review. The findings from the consultations will then be discussed highlighting how the views of participants helped to refine and shape the recommendations into options for the future delivery of least restrictive practices in acute mental health services in Queensland.

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