Improving Mental Health Literacy in a General Hospital Setting: the role of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)

Dr Jenny Kelly
School of Public Health & Tropical Medicine
James Cook University

Lesley Higgs
Institute of Mental Health, Townsville Health Service District

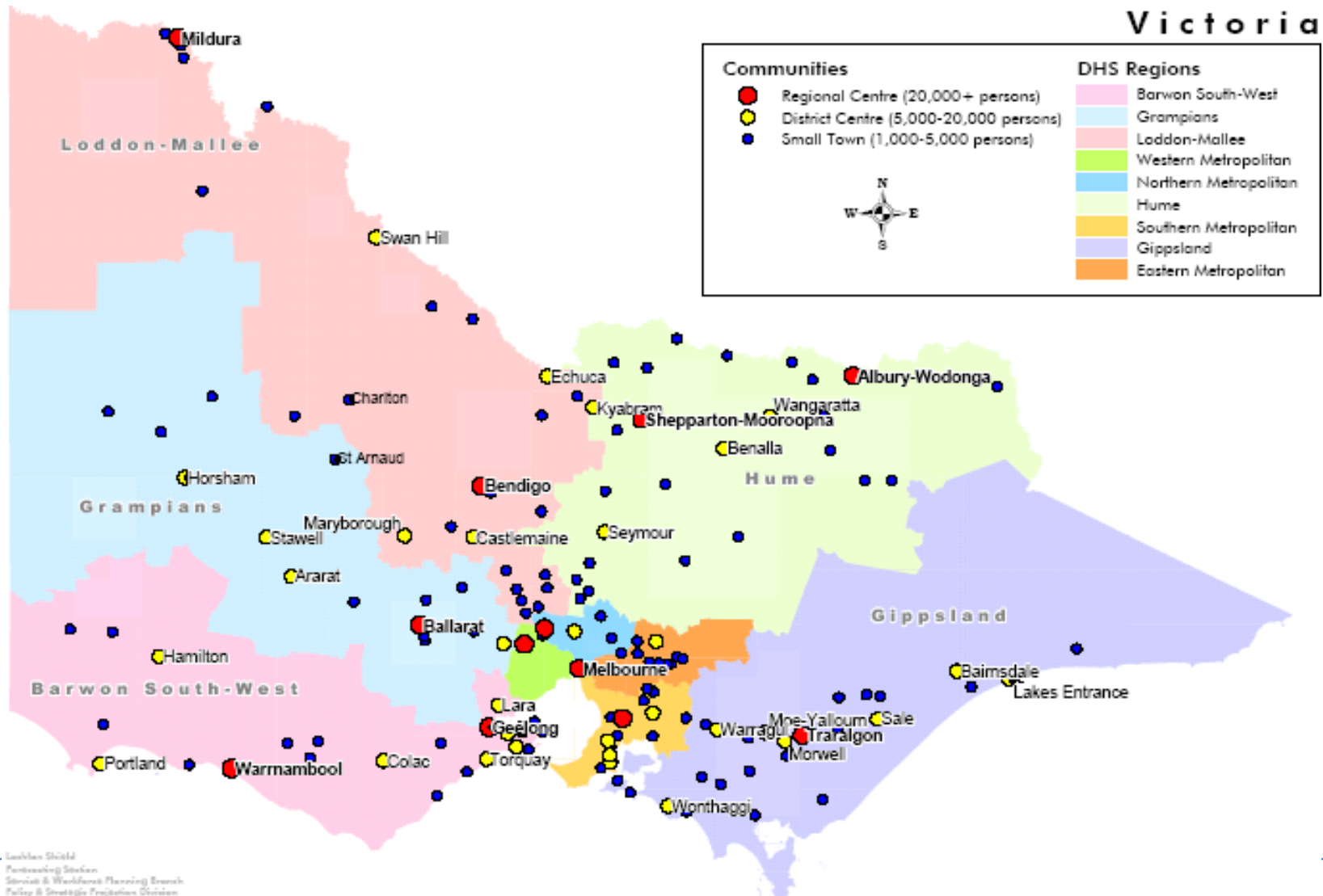# Outline of Presentation

- Introduction to Barwon Health

- Project Rationale (Why)

- Overview of MHFA (What)

- Implementation Stage (How)

- Outcomes and Lessons Learnt

Barwon Health

- Located in Geelong

- Victoria's largest regional hospital

- 921 beds

- 18 community sites

- 5000 + staff.

Regional Divisions

Women's Services

- Maternity care including community-based clinics, domiciliary care and a breastfeeding service

- 1987 births in 2009

- Children's Services provide hospital, home & community-based care for babies and children with complex needs.

Project Background

- In 2004 DHS funded a 12 month PND Early Intervention Project

- Low level of mental health literacy amongst midwives and other non mental health staff

- 12 hour MHFA course as a means of addressing this issue.

Perinatal Mental Health

It is estimated that 15-25% of women will develop a significant mental health problem between conception and 12 months postnatally.

Source: Priest et al. 2005

Maternal Deaths in Australia

- 211 maternal deaths classified as directly or indirectly related to pregnancy between 1997-2005

- Psychiatric illness was the third leading cause of all maternal deaths (11% deaths).

Source: Sullivan et al. 2007

Psychiatric Causes of Death

- 7 out of 10 deaths - suicide

- 5 suicides prior to birth (7 – 28 weeks)

- 2 suicides after birth

- 2 drug related deaths

- 1 pedestrian in motor vehicle accident.

What is MHFA?

- 12-hour training course developed to address the low level of mental health literacy in the community

- Explains the symptoms, causes and evidence-based treatments for:
  - depression
  - anxiety disorders
  - psychosis
  - substance misuse.
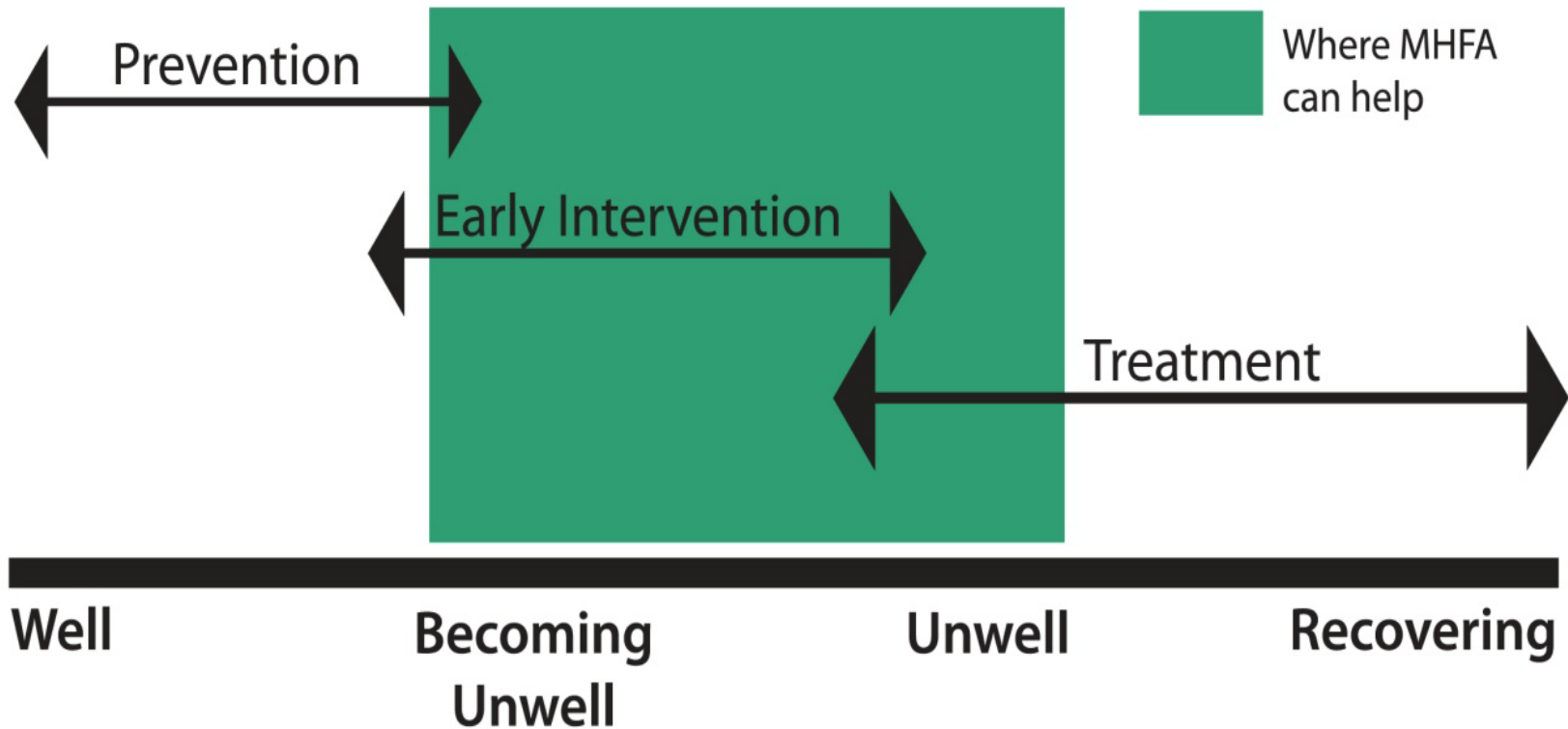
SPECTRUM OF INTERVENTIONS

Figure 1: Spectrum of mental health interventions from wellness to mental disorders and through to recovery, showing the contribution of MHFA
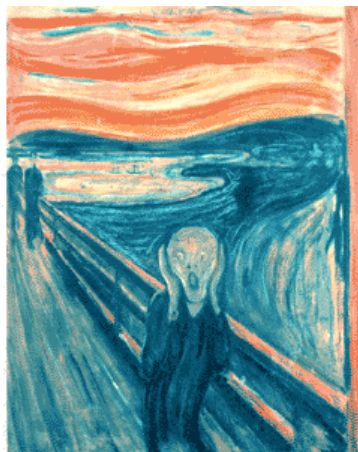
Course overview

SESSION 1 (3 hours)

+ Why Mental Health First Aid?
+ The Action Plan for Mental Health First Aid
+ Common Mental Health Problems

+ What is Depression?
+ Symptoms & Causes of Depression

SESSION 2 (3 hours)

+ Crisis First Aid for Suicidal Behaviour
+ Treatment and Resources for Depression

+ What are Anxiety Disorders?
+ Symptoms & Causes of Anxiety Disorders

SESSION 3 (3 hours)

- Crisis First Aid for Panic Attacks
- Crisis First Aid for Acute Stress Reaction
- Treatment & Resources for Anxiety Disorders

- What are Psychotic Disorders?
- Symptoms & Causes of Psychotic Disorders

SESSION 4 (3 hours)

- Crisis First Aid for Acute Psychosis
- Treatment & Resources for Psychosis

- What is Substance Use Disorder?
- Symptoms, Causes, Treatment & Resources
- Crisis First Aid for Overdose

MHFA Action Plan

1. **A** ssess Risk of Suicide or Harm

2. **L** isten Non-judgmentally

3. **G** ive Reassurance and Information

4. **E** ncourage Person to Get Appropriate Professional Help

5. **E** ncourage Self-help Strategies

Planning & Implementation

- Consultation with mental health service

- Contacted MHFA course author

- Project proposal was written

- Proposal plan presented at Executive meeting

- Approval granted to conduct a pilot and evaluate.

MHFA in the Hospital

- Introduced to midwives and paediatric nurses at Geelong Hospital in 2004

- Since 2004, 32 courses > 400 nurses/midwives

- All courses have input from local mental health service.

Who did MHFA?

- Midwives and Paediatric nurses
- ICU Nurses
- ED Nurses
- Aged Care Nurses
- Community Health Nurses
- Maternal and Child Health Nurses
- Allied Health staff.

Lessons Learnt

- Partnership with mental health service essential
- Management must see the value of the course
- Need to research well before implementation
- Facilitators with commitment to improving health outcomes for clients and their families essential
- Preference for two full days of training
- Need to keep course cost affordable.

Course Outcomes

- Greater understanding of the need to enquire about mental health during pregnancy

- Increased awareness of signs and symptoms of mental health problems

- Increased knowledge of local mental health services and referral pathways.

Course Outcomes (con't)

- Greater confidence in initiating a discussion about mental health and wellbeing

- More appropriate referrals to the PND support worker

- MHFA became a priority for new women's and children's services midwifery & nursing staff.

Summary

- MHFA is an evidence-based course that improves mental health literacy

- Collaboration between mental health and the acute hospital sector leads to improvements in health outcomes for clients, their families and staff

- MHFA could be introduced with similar benefits to general hospitals throughout Queensland and beyond.

Further Information

- www.mhfa.com.au

- jenny.kelly@jcu.edu.au

- lesley_higgs@health.qld.gov.au

Questions?