

Nurses in a self-help and advocacy group for Bipolar Disorders – Why are so few nurses joining our support groups?



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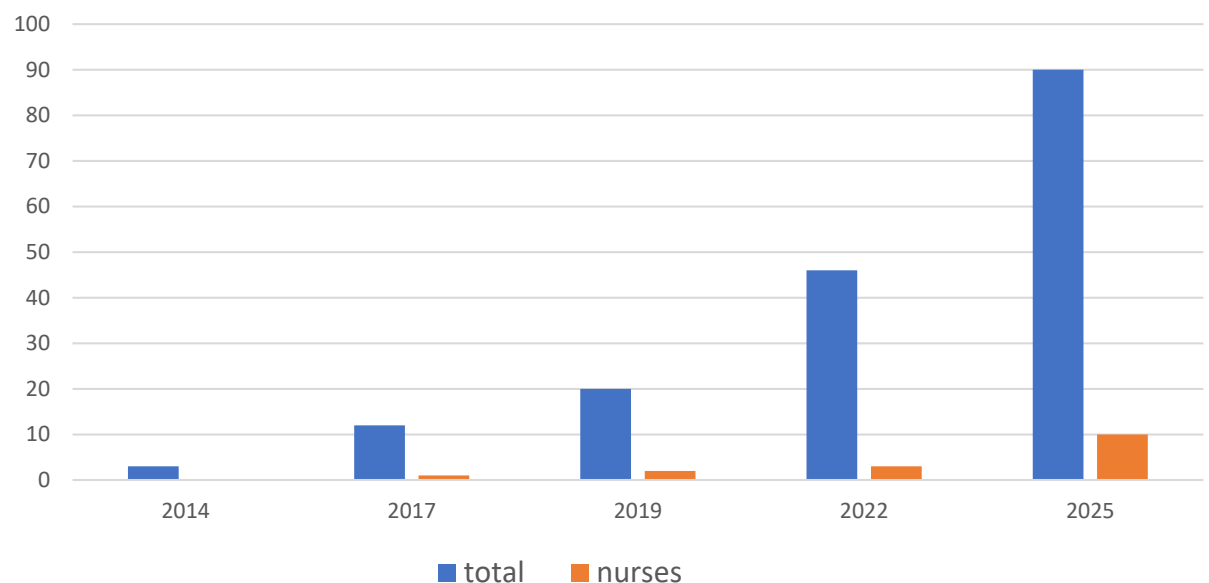
Background

Although health care professionals have a high risk of being diagnosed with mental disorders, mental health stigma is widespread in health services. Resulting feelings of shame and self-stigmatization lead to withdrawal and poorer chances of recovery. The advocacy group "Selbst Betroffene Profis" (Self-affected Professionals) was founded in 2014 by three psychiatrists with lived experience of bipolar disorder, aiming at reducing self-stigmatization and mental health stigma. Founded by psychiatrists, the SPB attracted mainly doctors, psychologists and students of both disciplines.



My name is Katrin Engert and I joined the group only in 2019 because I never knew before that nurses could take part in it.

Members in our support groups



Aim

Since 2021 I have been heading the SBP, so we started working on increasing the number of nurses in our groups.

Methods

To increase the number of participating nurses public media directed at nurses was used, e.g. by publishing an interview in the nurses' journal "Die Schwester | Der Pfleger", participating in podcasts, and presenting the SBP at congresses for nurses.

Results

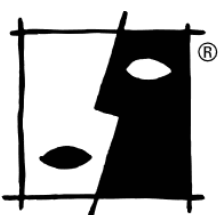
Since 2021, the number of nurses participating in SBP has increased from 2 to 10. Although this is a success, the number is small compared to the number of around 90 members in our support groups, especially when taking into consideration that nurses are the largest professional group in the healthcare sector.

Discussion

The SBP is a support and advocacy group open for all professionals working in the health sector who have been diagnosed with bipolar disorders. It offers confidential email and phone support, and virtual online self-help groups. Compared to the estimated number of nurses being affected by bipolar disorders in Germany (about 42000), their number being organized in the SBP remains small despite our efforts to raise more awareness. Thus, it seems very important to identify possible causes: One of them might be that the support offered is not specifically targeted for nurses with their complicated shift plans which makes it difficult to attend regular (online) meetings. Another reason might be a lack of knowledge about the SBP and their support offers and advocacy work despite the group's effort. In this case it is essential to identify better ways of reaching out to that special group of health care professionals. In Germany, most of the nurses are not organized in national unions, which makes it difficult to spread our information. Another assumption is that in the nursing field the experience of stigmatization and the reluctance in seeking help might be even worse than among other health workers.

*Sources from the authors

<https://dgbs.de/bipolare-stoerung/fuer-betroffene-profis/selbst-betroffene-profis>



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