

Letter to the Editor

A relevant practical course for mental health care providers in South Africa

Sir,

The South African Mental Health Care Act defines mental health care provider as a person providing mental health care services to mental health care users and includes mental health care practitioners.¹ Mental health care practitioner means a nurse, psychiatrist or registered medical practitioner, psychologist, occupational therapist or social worker who has been trained at an accredited institution to provide prescribed mental health care, treatment and rehabilitation services. For a South African mental health provider to render high-quality mental health care, treatment and rehabilitation services, that mental health care provider should have been exposed to theory and practical teaching and learning in Intellectual Disability (ID). One of the most relevant practical courses for intellectual disability in South Africa is offered by the Sunshine Association.² The name of the course is START, meaning strive towards achieving results together. START is an indigenous, unique training programme for children with disability. It is a practical and hands on course presented by qualified trainers such as Dr Gill Lloyd, Prof MP Koen, Prof Lorna Jacklin and Prof Marie Poggenpoel. The course is based on normal development for the age group 0-4 years. The duration of the course is 3 days for people with level 4 qualification and 5 days for people with a qualification below level 4 or matric. On completion of the course, participants such as mental health care providers and nursing or medical students will be able to clearly understand developmental areas, be able to assess and determine areas of difficulties or delays, know how to stimulate children, especially in

areas of difficulties or delays, be able to structure an intervention programme with activities and home care programmes, be empowered to help children with disabilities and developmental delays reach their full potential. As an advanced mental health care practitioner, I strongly encourage all South African mental health care providers to attend a START course in order to be able to render high-quality mental health care, treatment and rehabilitation services to people with intellectual disability. More information about the course can be obtained from <http://www.sunshine.org.za/>.

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