

BULLETIN

Danielle Garden, registered psychiatric nurse

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BY LAURA BUSHEIKIN

Registered psychiatric nurse Danielle Garden is a woman with a mission: making life better for psychiatric patients.

This goal shapes everything she does — her interactions with patients, her relationships with co-workers and supervisors, her career choices, and her union involvement.

Two years ago, after graduating with a bachelor's degree in psychiatric nursing from Douglas College (where she also completed the mental health worker program), Danielle set a well-defined career goal: "I wanted to work my way up in order to have a voice," she explains. She wanted the opportunity to not just help individuals, but also to make the whole system better.

Danielle worked at Surrey Memorial's Timber Creek facility on a clinical implementation team preparing for the opening of the new facility. When Timber Creek opened Danielle worked on the psychiatric intensive care unit. This March she began a new position as a clinical nurse educator in the mental health substance use emergency department, where she plays a key role in getting the new department open and putting together programs. In short, she is well-placed to make the whole system better. Goal achieved. Behind this drive and dedication lies a deep empathy.

"Some people find it scary to work with psychiatric patients, especially in emergency. But I'm not scared. I'm not intimidated. I see every person as a human being. I treat them as if they were my brother, my sister, my friend. I think, if I were in this position, how would I want to be treated?" says Danielle.

This natural empathy also drives Danielle's advocacy.

"I'm always evaluating the care we're providing, thinking about how to make it better, how to provide more resources, how to educate patients, and how to make their process through the mental health system as smooth as possible.

"I'm a do-er — I say, okay, let's fix this," she explains. "But of course that takes time. It doesn't happen overnight. To understand how the system works you have to get involved. I attend a lot of meetings and ask a lot of questions. I find out how things run and who is in charge, and then I go talk to them. Most of the time people are receptive."

To be an effective advocate, says Danielle, you have to be self-driven. "It's not going to come to you. You have to go get it!" she says. As an example, she describes how she dealt with a recent challenge at her facility.

"We work with very acute patients, and so the question is how to manage challenging patients while still maintaining respect.

"We have a brand new team coming into the facility, all bringing different experiences to the table. I spoke to the staff and found out their concerns, then we discussed it as a group, and then I went to the patient care coordinator and the program coordinator with suggestions. So now we are working on methods to manage challenging patients in a safe manner, while maintaining their dignity and respect and keeping them safe."

Danielle's passion for advocacy extends beyond her patients to her profession. She is concerned with reports she's been hearing that BCNU is making attempts to bring RPNs into their union.

"I don't agree with this. I pride myself on being an RPN as a specialty. If we were to be homogenized with the registered nurses we might lose our voice as a profession. Unlike RNs, who have general training, we have had four years of specialized training so we really are the best people to deal with psychiatric illness."

Given Danielle's strong appreciation of HSA as the best union for RPNs, and her natural drive towards advocacy, union involvement was a natural choice. Last year she became the only RPN steward for her facility.

"RPNs work very hard and we deserve to be protected in our jobs. HSA provides this. Being a steward is a great opportunity to educate myself and to be able to assist people around me who have questions or are struggling," says Danielle.

"If you are not educated, you don't have a voice. If you don't like how things are, you can't just sit back and complain. You have to get involved and make change. You have to go out and do it — and don't let anything stop you," she says.

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