



OPA Position Statement on Safety for Women in Adult Acute Psychiatric Inpatient Units

September 2010

OPA has ongoing concerns about the lack of safety for women in mixed-sex adult acute psychiatric inpatient units. OPA acknowledges that women with a mental illness may be vulnerable in these settings and that a lack of safety can lead to abuse, violence, harassment and unwanted sexual advances. This experience can have a compound and traumatic effect where women have placed their trust in psychiatric services to care for them.

OPA participated in the Department of Human Services Gender Sensitivity and Safety in Acute Adult Inpatient Units Project and was supportive of its recommendations. As recommended in the project report (2008), OPA advocates for a policy of choice for patients to be treated in single-sex environments to be incorporated into the design guidelines for adult acute psychiatric inpatient units in Victoria. In pre-existing environments where there are no separate women's areas, OPA advocates for the establishment of women-only corridors with door locking systems and access to their own bathroom facilities as minimum safety standards.

OPA acknowledges the recent development of the Chief Psychiatrist and Service guidelines *Promoting sexual safety, responding to sexual activity, and managing allegations of sexual assault in adult acute inpatient units* (2010). Associated with the introduction of these guidelines, OPA advocates strongly for the provision of training in gender sensitive service provision, trauma-informed care in mental illness, sexual abuse and the management of sexual assault. OPA advocates for ongoing monitoring and improvement of sexual safety practices.