

The Social Organization of Access to Mental Health Services: An Institutional Ethnography

Annette Lane, RN, PhD (C)

With our aging population growing exponentially, Canadian society is on the precipice of an interesting, yet potentially challenging time in healthcare. By 2016, 5.7 million Canadians will be 65 years of age or older (Statistics Canada, 2001). A number of these individuals will suffer from some form of mental illness. Currently, prevalence rates within the community are approximately 15-30% (SAGMHS, 2003). Within nursing homes, approximately 50% of individuals show signs of depression (Canadian Coalition for Seniors Mental Health, 2003).



Despite the current and looming growth of our aging population, there is an identified lack of services in Canada, as well as challenges in accessing services. I have chosen to use Institutional Ethnography (IE), a qualitative, sociological research methodology to study the challenges older adults have in accessing services. Within this study, I will look at the experiences of older adults accessing geriatric mental health services (Phase 1), the work of front-line staff in geriatric mental health (Phase 2) (e.g. how are decisions made that impact patient care; what forms are used to make decisions), and how what shapes decision making at the managerial level (Phase 3) (e.g. funding).