



Alan Witt, Northland DHB

If you can walk into seclusion, you can be de-escalated, says Alan Witt, clinical nurse manager at the Tumanako inpatient unit at Whangarei Hospital.

Alan started work at Tumanako in March 2020 and is proud to be helping his team minimise and work towards the eventual elimination of seclusion.

Having staff 'buy in' by including them in the vision is key, Alan says.

"If people are used to acting in a certain way, it's difficult to break that culture. You need education, role modelling, to be there for people to talk to." Alan says active learning is key, having teammates enable each other and model good behaviour. "We're busy, but if we want to enable best practice, we need to make the time."

Seclusion had traditionally been a last resort at Tumanako Hospital.

"It was used to provide a place of 'safety'. Particularly for violent people, or those at risk of self-harm. We know now that it's a punitive approach and we need to find different ways to de-escalate situations.

"Things like providing structure, and having more cultural input and education for staff can all help head off antisocial behaviour."

Alan says the use of safe practice and effective communication (SPEC), talking therapies and staged entries have all been useful.

"It's not just a medical model - we bring in culturally appropriate people to negotiate with distressed clients. We provide more resource to enable better management. We encourage active intervention from whānau and from community teams."

Tumanako has a minimal stimulation lounge where consumers can have one-on-one support from staff.



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"There's access to toilets and showers, to good kai and cups of tea. If patients want to talk, they can."

However, Alan says consumers who need to access the minimal stimulation lounge are often experiencing trauma.

"It's important to debrief after incidents and enable staff to go through the client experience. I take a group of staff members into the minimal stimulation lounge. We ask them to go into the room, lay on the floor and then we get them to go in as a team. The empathy goes up."

Alan can't over-emphasise the importance of supporting staff.

"It can be mentally exhausting to keep up, forever role modelling, but it's worth it in the end. We're not perfect, we're not where we need to be yet but it's an ongoing best practice model."