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Safety in acute mental health inpatient settings: what does it mean?

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Safety is a priority in mental health workplaces. The term safety appears to be axiomatic, as some mental health policies and strategies, despite being focused on safety, leave the concept undefined. Before considering how safety can be enhanced in mental health workplaces however, this paper argues that we need an explicit, and shared, understanding of what safety means for those who will be impacted. Acute mental health inpatient units are mental health workplaces. Stakeholders include nurses, allied health, medical, administrative, security, hospitality, maintenance staff, and consumer workers. The organisation - from unit to Ministry level - is also a stakeholder. Outside the workforce, but with a fervent interest in safety in this setting, are people who have experienced admission to an acute mental health inpatient unit, and their family/carers. Does safety mean the same thing to all these stakeholders, and will the same strategies enhance safety from each stakeholder's perspective? This paper presents the findings from a study which explored the meaning of safety from the perspective of people who had experienced admission to the acute mental health inpatient setting. Based on these findings, the implications for understanding what safety means from other stakeholders' perspectives will be discussed.