

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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When Performance Measurement Isn't Enough - Towards National Benchmarking For Australia's Mental Health Services.

Abstract

For eight years, a range of quality papers has been presented to this annual conference reporting on numerous one-off projects that have been undertaken to advance the outcomes agenda. At the same time, we have seen only moderate progress in testing the generalisability of most findings to other settings and in demonstrating the sustainability of outcome measurement in routine practice.

One-off studies are important, but they are not enough because they do not result in durable cultural shifts. Durable cultural shifts at the systems level are required if health outcomes measurement is to survive the test of time and not become one of the many fads that come and go. At the service delivery level, we are yet to learn whether health outcomes approaches are sustainable over time and as key staff move on. We also have much to learn about how to turn outcome data into information and how to disseminate that information.

In many respects, mental health services in Australia are leading the way on the introduction of routine health outcome measurement, and other clinical streams have much to learn from their progress to date. That progress has accelerated since 1999, when all States and Territories agreed to implement an information agenda enunciated in *Mental Health Information Development: National Information Priorities and Strategies* under the Second National Mental Health Plan 1998-2003. This document commits all States and Territories to collect what is, by both national and international standards, a rich set of information about the cost, quality and outcomes of Australia's mental health services.

This paper will report on research¹ undertaken to assist the Commonwealth, States and Territories, clinicians, consumers and other stakeholders to identify what mental health data might be useful in developing performance indicators and benchmarks for the mental health sector. The goal was to reach agreement on the purposes to which the information would be put and, by extension, which of the data items and data sets would be useful. The next logical step is to further refine the analysis methods described in this paper and to translate these methods into routine practice. The Australian Mental Health Outcomes and Classification Network (AMHOCN) will soon take up this next stage. AMHOCN is being established to provide the authoritative focal point for national leadership in the development of outcomes and casemix concepts in mental health.

1. Eagar, K. Burgess, P. Buckingham, B. (2003) Towards National Benchmarks for Australian Mental Health Services. ISC Discussion Paper No 4. Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra

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