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The Contribution Of Process Measures To Improvements In Practice And Health Outcomes.

Abstract

The focus on effectiveness and efficiency in the provision of mental health care in New Zealand over the last decade has brought the issues of quality practice and outcome measurement into the spotlight. Ascertaining the degree to which quality improvement and monitoring systems are enhancing professional practice and consumer outcomes, however, is hindered by the difficulty of measuring the quality of care. Although outcomes measures of quality represent the desired end results of health care, validated process of care measures provide an important additional element to quality improvement efforts, as they illuminate exactly which provider actions could be changed to improve patient outcomes.

This paper will discuss a bicultural study by O'Brien et al. (2002) that developed and validated generic and Maori-specific clinical indicators for mental health nursing standards of practice and applied these clinical indicators in a national field study at eleven District Health Board mental health services throughout New Zealand. Clinical indicators are process measures that evaluate the quality of consumer care. We present results from the national field study that revealed wide variation in the degree to which the clinical indicators are being achieved in clinical practice. This finding illustrates the value of process measures in assessing practice improvement programs. Attention to underlying causes of poor achievement of process factors, such as recovery-focused care, is likely to positively impact on consumer outcomes and ultimately consumer recovery. Future research is planned to examine the link between improved achievement of process factors and consumer outcomes in mental health.

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