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Health of the Nation Outcome Scales (HoNOS): Has The Time Come For Revisions?

Abstract

The current version of the HoNOS has been in use since 1996. In that time it has been used with a wide variety of patient groups and service types, some of which had not been envisaged by the developers. Experience in the field and research have identified a number of shortcomings in the instrument. The question therefore arises whether the scale should be revised. Broadly, two kinds of change can be contemplated:

1. minor changes: which might consist of clarifications, and removal of ambiguities, and/or
2. major changes: which might consist of adding, removing, or modifying items.

Areas in which shortcomings or other issues have been identified will be discussed under the following headings:

- issues relating to individual scales;
- additional guidance to raters in deciding a rating level;
- issues relating to core HoNOS rules;
- how should cultural and contextual factors be handled;
- how should summary scores be computed when some ratings are missing;
- standardizing when a HoNOS is to be completed; and
- issues of consistency and comparability between variants of HoNOS.

A decision to revise a scale in widespread use cannot be taken lightly. The advantages and disadvantages of minor and major changes will be briefly considered, and some suggestions for the way forward presented. In 2002, the National Mental Health Working Group Information Strategy Committee, under the auspices of the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, established an Adult Mental Health Outcomes Expert Group (AMHOEG). One of the Group's terms of reference was to provide advice on future modifications to the outcome measures used for adult mental health consumers included in the National Outcomes and Casemix Collection (NOCC). Consequent to this, two members of the group, Bill Buckingham and Tom Trauer, were contracted earlier this year to develop a discussion paper relating specifically to the Health of the Nation Outcome Scales (HoNOS). The accompanying PowerPoint presentation is an abbreviated and preliminary summary of the discussion paper, which is still in draft form. It is expected that the paper will be available in early 2004. As Slide 4 of the PowerPoint presentation states:

1. A focus on revision necessarily addresses problem areas. This should not be taken as implying that HoNOS is unsuitable for routine implementation.
2. HoNOS is a copyrighted instrument, and is being widely used in the UK, Australia and New Zealand. No jurisdiction is bound by changes made by another.
3. The ideas presented are discussion points only, not decisions.

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