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The Challenge of Demonstrating Change in Routine Clinical Practice

Abstract:

Australia's National Mental Health Strategy, adopted initially in 1992, emphasises the continued improvement of the quality and effectiveness of treatment for people with mental illness. It recognises that sound information is necessary to support these endeavours and, as a result, all Australian state/territory governments are collecting and reporting outcomes and casemix data with a view to improving clinical practice and developing a research and evaluation culture within public sector mental health services.

It is almost 5 years since the process of routine outcome measurement commenced. In some ways, this ambitious plan is still in its infancy although there are emerging patterns of how there has been a shift from it being perceived as an ‘initiative’ towards it being accepted as ‘standard, day to day, clinical’. While there remains variability regarding data coverage, completeness and compliance, routine outcome and casemix measurement is beginning to demonstrate utility and value in terms of benchmarking and understanding service variation.

This paper considers the substantive findings of how practice has informed consumer outcomes and our understanding of outcomes are dependent on other factors such as ‘case complexity’, and how, these in turn, are related to the perspective taken (e.g., the clinician’s perspective, the consumer’s perspective, the carer’s perspective, etc).

Lessons can be learned from the implementation of routine outcomes and casemix measurement in mental health. Specific consideration must be given to the challenges of industry change and the risks and benefits to all stakeholders.