

National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Healthcare Professionals Working in Police Custody Settings

Case Study

Lothian and Borders Police

In Lothian and Borders, healthcare in police custody is contracted to the NHS. In the past, the healthcare service was delivered entirely by FMEs; currently the role of nurses is being developed, leading to a new role for Clinical Forensic Nurses. The NOS were therefore used to define the roles of FMEs and nurses and to support the development of the nurses' forensic skills.

The Situation

Lothian and Borders covers Edinburgh and the surrounding region. The main custody suite for Edinburgh is St Leonards, with three other main suites in Livingstone, Dalkeith and Hawick. Healthcare in police custody is contracted to the NHS - this is a five year contract (currently at the end of year one). In the past, healthcare was provided exclusively by FMEs and there are currently two full-time employed FMEs on-call during day time hours (and also providing a morning surgery). In addition, there is a part time employed Medical Director in overall charge of the service, and a team of six out of hours FMEs who are salaried, with a contracted number of hours (on-call from home).

Since April 2006, a new nursing service has been introduced as part of the healthcare provision. This is partly due to the difficulty in recruitment of FMEs and also to benefit from on-site healthcare provision.

Two nurses are now on duty in the evenings (Monday to Sunday) and day time (Saturday and Sunday). They are based in the main custody suite at St Leonards, and provide peripatetic cover for the other custody suites. The nurses do not currently have training in forensic skills; their role is primarily to provide front-line triage. They do provide some treatment, but will also call out FMEs or make other referrals as appropriate.

The Aim

The aim is to increase the role of nursing staff through the development of their forensic skills to deal with a wider range of procedures. This project therefore came at a very opportune time to help define new roles and recruit/develop people into those roles.

The Action

Kim Crawford, the Service Manager reviewed the Functional Map for Healthcare Professionals Working in Police Custody Settings to identify the NOS relevant to FMEs and nurses. From this, she developed role profiles for FMEs and Clinical Forensic Nurses.

The Nurses reviewed the NOS relevant to their roles and were provided with copies of them for future reference. A new FME has also been recently recruited – he was provided with all the NOS relevant to the FME role as part of his induction.

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To date, the NOS have therefore been used to define roles and provide an objective description of the required standards of performance, in particular as guidance to new members of staff.

The Results

Feedback on the NOS has been generally positive i.e. that they provide a useful, objective description of the competences required. The nurses observed that currently, many of the NOS are more relevant to the FMEs than nurses. However, in highlighting areas which are not currently appropriate to the nurses role, the NOS provide a framework for planning future training and development e.g. in dealing with mental health and substance misuse.

Currently, Kim Crawford is piloting the use of assessment tools for the assessment of substance use withdrawal (covering opiates and alcohol). These tools aim to standardise procedures and provide documentary records of the procedures carried out. This process of standardising procedure fits very well with the potential uses of the NOS.

The Future

Kim has found the NOS very useful and intends to adopt the NOS as part of the clinical standards for the service.

In future, it is intended to widen the use of the NOS to support the appraisal of staff, to identify learning and development needs and to support recruitment and selection.

Contact Details

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