

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

Case Study

Surrey Police / NHS Trust

The NOS were used in Surrey to review the role of Custody Paramedics and to up-date the Custody Paramedic training programme. The NOS are now explicitly linked to the outcomes of the training programme, and will be used in future to support the identification of training needs and to provide a detailed specification of requirements for skill development.

The Situation

In Surrey, the majority of front line healthcare in police custody is delivered by Custody Paramedics. This service has been developed since 2003 through a partnership arrangement between the police and the local NHS ambulance service, a service which is unique in the UK. The service is delivered in the main by car-based 'single-responder' paramedics.

Initially, the Custody Paramedic service was piloted in one centre. This was supported by a training course to prepare State Registered Paramedics for their expanded role in covering custodial settings (delivered by trainers from both the ambulance service and the police). In addition, a 'tool box' was provided in the custody suite to provide the required consumables and equipment needed by the Custody Paramedics, supported by a series of protocols, procedures and related documentation.

In early 2005, the provision by Surrey Police of two additional single-responder vehicles was negotiated with the ambulance service and the Custody Paramedic service was rolled out across all four divisions in Surrey. This had the benefit of providing additional cover for custodial healthcare, and an expanded single-responder service which would also be available for 999 calls. The ambulance service now requires all single-responder paramedics to be trained as Custody Paramedics; there are currently some 105 Custody Paramedics trained within Surrey.

Therefore, Custody Paramedics have become the first point of call for most healthcare provision in police custody for fitness for detention/interview, treatment of minor injuries and the provision of certain medicines under a set of Patient Group Directions. Custody Sergeants can request a paramedic by phoning the ambulance control centre and providing a brief description of the situation. Each call is logged and given a custody reference number.

As a result, other services and specialists are only called upon when required. For example, FMEs are still called upon for cases which involve more serious crimes (such as murders, those involving sexual assaults, children, injury to police officers), and prescription of some medicines. The mental health team is available for provision of comprehensive mental health assessments as required.

The Aim

The aim was to identify the NOS which are relevant to the role of Custody Paramedics and use these to review and up-dated the Custody Paramedic training programme.

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The Action

Jeff Jann, Surrey Police's Custody Medical Consultant, selected the NOS which appeared to be most relevant to the role of Custody Paramedics from the functional map for healthcare professionals working in police custody. Working with paramedics and their trainers, the selected NOS were then reviewed in more detail to check that they were fit for purpose. Jeff then cross-referenced the NOS to the training programme for Custody Paramedics.

The Results

It was found that the NOS were useful in describing the roles of healthcare practitioners, and in particular provided clarity regarding the detailed requirements for specific functions. Some NOS were found to be particularly relevant to FMEs, some to cover generic healthcare and some specified the competences needed by Custody Paramedics; this provided a useful distinction between roles.

Referencing the training programme for Custody Paramedics to the NOS was also helpful as this made an explicit link between the locally developed training programmes and a nationally recognised standard. The relevant NOS are now referenced on the back of the Custody Paramedic training programme certificates.

The Future

In the future, it is intended to collate all the NOS relevant to Custody Paramedics into a booklet which can be given to Custody Paramedics as part of their training pack.

The NOS will also be used to support the identification of development needs and the continuing development of the Custody Paramedic Role. In particular, it is hoped to further develop the forensic skills of Custody Paramedics and in time, to take on additional functions currently carried out by FMEs. However, it is not envisaged that all paramedics will go forward for this specialist forensic training and it is anticipated that the NOS will be used to describe the required competences and to identify the individual training needs of practitioners.

Contact Details

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