

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

Case Study

Fife Constabulary

In Fife, the national occupational standards (NOS) were used to review the substance misuse services delivered by FMEs. A service audit was carried out which confirmed the current competence of the FMEs and supported the development of stronger links with specialist substance misuse services. The NOS will be used in future to support the continuing professional development for FMEs in working with substance misusers.

The Situation

In Fife, healthcare in police custody is delivered by FMEs i.e. other healthcare professionals are not currently used. Kranti Hiremath is employed full time by Fife Constabulary as their Principal FME. In addition, there are five other contracted FMEs who provide an on-call service. The FMEs contracted to Fife Constabulary are all GPs who have completed additional training to prepare them for their role as FMEs. Typically, this includes the training in forensic medicine delivered by CENTREX and other specialist training (such as the course in child protection accredited by Edinburgh University and the Royal College of Paediatricians).

In addition to their training, new FMEs are required to keep a log book of cases dealt with in custody which is used to monitor their levels of experience in the custodial setting. A database of all cases seen in custody is also maintained to monitor the type and volume of services provided.

Fife has three custody suites, all of which are equipped with a medical room. Separate provision is being made available for victims of sexual assault at the Police HQ.

The Aim

It was decided to review the draft NOS by focussing on the competences required when dealing with substance misusers.

The Action

The Skills for Health Functional Map was used to identify the NOS most relevant to substance misuse services. These included selecting NOS developed for drug and alcohol services (DANOS) and the following draft NOS for healthcare in police custody:

- Advise on the fitness of individuals to be detained in police custody
 - Advise on the fitness of individuals for police interview
 - Advise on the fitness of individuals for travel, transfer or release from police custody
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A service audit was then undertaken to assess whether current practice is consistent with the standards described in the NOS. This was conducted through consultation with experienced FMEs and reference to approximately 100 cases.

The Results

It was found that experienced FMEs were already working to the standards described in the NOS. This was as anticipated, particularly as some of the FMEs have already completed specialist training (e.g. the RCGP certificate course in substance misuse).

However, the process of conducting the service audit provided a useful opportunity to review and develop inter-agency working. In particular the options for referral of substance misusers to specialist services were highlighted. Kranti reported that “since the selection as a test site we now make a conscious effort to refer custodies to the Drug Addiction Team and Fife Alcohol Team”.

The review of the draft NOS in Fife also ensured that differences in legislation between Scotland and the rest of the UK were reflected in the NOS.

The Future

It is intended to further develop links with specialist substance misuse services; in particular an Arrest Referral Scheme is being developed. There are also plans for a formal annual update meeting with the Head of Addiction Services for Fife, Tayside and Stirling. It is hoped that other areas of substance misuse services will also be developed, including securing immunisations for blood borne viruses with the NHS.

In future, the NOS will be used to identify the current competence in substance misuse (and requirements for CPD) for new FMEs joining the service. A formal training programme in Addiction Services will be developed for all new FMEs.

Contact Details

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