

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

Case Study

Mersey Care NHS Trust

Criminal Justice Mental Health Liaison Service

The Criminal Justice Mental Health Liaison team at Mersey Care used the NOS to review their police custody service provision and to revise related documentation. The NOS were found to be consistent with current working practice, and provided clarity regarding the required standards of performance. It was suggested that using the NOS has the potential to provide consistency in multi-agency working and to support future development of services.

The Situation

Mersey Care NHS Trust provides a mental health service covering six of the eight Merseyside police custody suites, all the courts in Merseyside and Walton Prison.

The mental health liaison team is nurse-led, with one team manager, one nurse manager and three psychiatric nurses. The team provides mental health assessments, including liaison with, and referral to specialist services. The team also provides training for other agencies (particularly police) in mental health awareness. The service primarily operates Monday to Friday (9.00am to 5.00pm), but also provides on-call service out of these hours.

All team members have a detailed job description. Supervision meetings take place every four to six weeks and Personal Development Plans (PDPs) are reviewed on a six monthly basis. PDPs are supported by the development of portfolios which record development activity and reflective practice (and are referenced to the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework).

The Aim

The aim was to use the national occupational standards (NOS) to review the current model of service provision and the related documentation.

The Action

The NOS were initially used to develop a service profile, identifying the NOS relevant to the Mental Health Liaison Service staff at bands 6, 7 and 8. This was used to indicate those NOS which are currently relevant, and those which could be relevant in the future, as the services develops.

The team then reviewed in detail the most relevant draft NOS; in particular those relating to obtaining valid consent, fitness to detain, fitness to interview and fitness for travel, transfer or release.

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The Results

The content of the draft NOS were found to be generally good and actually “provided some re-assurance” as they were consistent with the team’s current working practices. Although the NOS were being reviewed for the custody setting, it was felt that many of the NOS could equally apply in other settings e.g. courts, prison etc.

As part of the review process, procedures and forms were revised to reflect the performance criteria within the standards in the following areas:

- Custody suite contact
- Obtaining valid consent
- Fitness to detain, interview and use of an appropriate adult

Mark Sergeant, the team manager, reported that this resulted in an improvement of the documentation: in particular, reference to the NOS provided a greater level of detail to illustrate the required standards of performance.

The Future

In general, it was felt that the NOS could support a greater consistency in practice, in particular to support multi-agency working. This would enable procedures to become “more seamless” and potentially provide increased emphasis for a ‘health culture’ in the custodial setting.

In the future, job descriptions will be referenced to the NOS to make the job descriptions more informative. The NOS will also support the appraisal process, in particular providing a more explicit link to the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF). Already, staff use reflective practice and compile portfolios of evidence as part of their continuing professional development. The NOS would enhance this process by providing an objective description of the standards required for specific functions.

It is also anticipated that the NOS will inform the debate around the future development and planning of services.

In common with any new initiative, the integration of the NOS with current processes and procedures will take time. The wider implementation of the NOS now needs to be considered and addressed.

Contact Details

For further information on this case study, please contact:

Mark Sergeant, Team Manager

Criminal Justice Mental Health Liaison Service, Mersey Care NHS Trust

Email: mark.sergeant@merseycare.nhs.uk
