

HELP-SEEKING IN ASSOCIATION WITH ALCOHOL TREATMENT: USING VISUAL MAPPING TO UNDERSTAND SERVICE USE PATHWAYS

Authors:

Berends L¹, Savic M²

¹ Centre for Health and Social Research, Australian Catholic University, ² Turning Point Eastern Health

Introduction: Many people in need of alcohol treatment have multiple needs however treatment is often considered in terms of discrete episodes and without a full appreciation of other help-seeking behaviour.

Method: This case study involved a purposeful sample of 16 'high-end' service users at entry to alcohol treatment, selected from a large-scale study on treatment pathways. Structured interviews at treatment entry documented participant demographics and well-being along with each instance of service use and referral source, and criminal justice system contacts in the previous year. Descriptive statistical analysis and visual mapping analysis were applied.

Key Findings: Participants were male (56.3%), averaged 45 years and reported 466 instances of health and welfare service use in the past year. GP visits and employment service use were common while alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment was minor. There were 20 contacts with the criminal justice system. Almost half the referrals were from other services, while informal referrals were usually self or family. A typology of three service use pathways was developed, involving those with continuity in AOD treatment, being new to AOD treatment, and using multiple health services that included some AOD treatment.

Discussions and Conclusions: Diverse patterns of service and system use were identified, suggesting opportunities for earlier intervention and the need for models of care including a focus predominantly on AOD use problems as well as holistic models. Re-presenting service use and referral sources visually facilitated the identification of key points in the pathway for investigation in the larger project.

Implications for Practice or Policy: People in AOD treatment are clients of many other services, suggesting that cross-system co-ordination is fundamental.

Implications for Translational Research: Visual mapping is a useful way of representing patterns in help-seeking at client level, providing direction for targeted quantitative analyses of large data sets and further qualitative research.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: For this paper, there is no known existing relationship that could be viewed as presenting a potential conflict of interest.