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Effectiveness of case management in treating substance abusers: Results of a metaanalysis

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Abstract:

INTRODUCTION Developing countries that seek to strengthen their substance abuse continuum of care can benefit from previous research that is relevant to their planned changes. One of the interventions that may be considered for inclusion in their continuum of care is case management, adapted from the mental health field and now widely used with substance abusers. This discussion will provide the results of a meta-analysis of case management with substance abusers. Research and service delivery professionals can use these findings to help them make decisions about whether or not to use case management with their substance abusing populations. Should they decide to use case management the findings will inform their decisions about how to use it most effectively. **METHODS** A meta-analysis of controlled clinical trials was conducted to test the effectiveness of case management with substance abusers. The original meta-analysis of 15 studies was co-sponsored by the Campbell Collaboration and Cochrane Collaboration (Hesse, Vanderplasschen, Rapp, Broekaert, & Fridell, 2007). The meta-analyses represented close to 7,000 substance abusers who were randomly assigned to either a case management intervention or a comparison group. In some studies the comparison group consisted of clients receiving a usual standard of care (11 studies), and in other studies an intervention such as motivational interviewing was the comparison group (4 studies). Moderator analyses were conducted that helped explain the role of methodological quality, manualized intervention, setting, and target population on the effectiveness of case management. Findings from the original meta-analysis will be presented along with the results from more recent studies. **RESULTS** Analyses demonstrated that in 12 of 13 studies case management had consistent positive effects in helping clients improve treatment related tasks such as entry into treatment, retention in treatment, and satisfaction with treatment services. Success in these areas is absolutely essential if substance abusers are to benefit from treatment. Alternately, case management had inconsistent and weak effects in assisting substance abusers achieve better clinical outcomes such as reduced substance use or better employment. Moderator analyses demonstrated that having a manual to guide case manager interactions with clients was important in improving the effectiveness of case management, especially in linking with treatment. **CONCLUSIONS** The results of this meta-analysis suggest that case management helps substance abusers accomplish specific tasks such as linkage that are important to the treatment continuum in developed countries. It appears that it is up to treatment programs' other services (e.g., group therapy) to improve clinical outcomes. The implication of these results for both policy decisions and direct service in developing countries will be discussed, as will the implications of the meta-analysis for future case management studies.
