

Process Evaluation of the Saskatoon Mental Health Strategy (MHS)

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The Saskatoon Mental Health Strategy Court (MHS Court) was introduced in November 2013, and the Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science and Justice Studies conducted a process evaluation examining the initial implementation of the Court between November 2013 to August 2014. Interviews were conducted with 14 individuals who worked in the fields of law, social work, health, or other sectors through which they assist individuals with mental health conditions. Initial and final dockets for each Court session were also collected and included information on the 117 individuals who had appeared before the Court during the study timeframe.

Research Questions

- Is the MHS meeting the expectations of participants?
- Are the activities of MHS functioning effectively?
- Are the clients satisfied with their experience with the MHS?
- Is the MHS addressing the mental health condition or cognitive impairment concerns of participants involved with the MHS?
- Is the MHS receiving participants with mental health conditions or cognitive impairments?

Results

Perceived Strengths of the MHS

- All interviewees had positive attitudes about the program.
- Ample time was spent on individual case files.
- Commitment to the program was strong.
- Mental Health Strategy improved legal effectiveness.

Perceived Challenges of the MHS

- Saskatoon MHS Court docket size was too large and put pressure on team members due to the amount of preparation required.
- With the large number of clients and time needed to prepare for pre-court meetings, it was difficult for professionals to spend much time on each client's case and, therefore, left them only a few minutes to discuss each case.

Recommendations

- Hire a regular team member to focus on coordinating communication, scheduling, and assisting with administration work.
- MHS Court sessions need to be held more frequently, fewer individuals should be placed on each docket, and intake assessments should be completed for each client prior to participating in the Court.



Future Research

- Gather more quantitative data with an eye toward client outcome on various measures including recidivism and quality of life indicators.
- Investigation into the MHS referral process to determine how clients are ending up in the MHS, and if any individuals with mental health conditions are still "falling through the cracks" by not connecting with MHS even after they enter the Saskatoon Provincial Court.

