



Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2011

I25 Maintaining Viability and Relevance of a Forensic Psychiatric Court Evaluation Service in an Era of Fiscal Constraint

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be familiar with the scope of services that are available and possible within an urban forensic psychiatric court evaluation service, the systems challenges faced in a time of economic stringency, and the need to balance efficiency and cost effective operations with the delivery of accurate and quality forensic examination services.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community in considering the potential effects of economic forces upon organizations providing forensic examination services, and the necessary response of remaining conscientious about systems efficiency and fiscal responsibility while still adhering to the principles of careful and appropriate forensic services.

The tightening of budgets that has affected virtually every organization and government entity over the past several years has also impacted health care systems and the delivery of forensic services. In New York City, the Forensic Psychiatry Clinic has provided embedded forensic psychiatric evaluation services to the New York County Criminal and Supreme Courts since the 1930's. Its scope of service has included the examination of competency to stand trial, pre- and post- sentencing mental health evaluations, and evaluation services for probation. Its chief stakeholders include the criminal justice system, those defendants who become the subjects of examination, and the city health systems that provide for the administration of the service. Given consolidation of health care services across hospitals and clinics, reductions in staffing and services, and careful appraisal of the utility and efficiency of services by oversight and administrative agencies, it is critical for systems providing forensic evaluation services to be proactive in examining their existing programs and procedures, to be flexible in considering alternatives that may promote greater efficiency and costs savings, and to be creative and open to development of additional services that may increase the contribution and value of the system to its stakeholders. The issue is a pleading refrain that the current structure and program of services is under strain due to growing demand, but level or reducing staff, is unfortunately unlikely to yield increased resources. Rather, becoming aware of and being responsive to the specific concerns and needs of stakeholders is essential in guiding the development of relevant programs of service. For example, as pertains to the Forensic Psychiatry Clinic, consideration may be given to expanding the array of forensic psychiatric evaluation services to include examinations of defendants being considered for diversion from their criminal court proceedings into the mental health system, or augmentation of probation evaluations to provide for specific treatment recommendations, referrals to appropriate mental health services under conditions of probation, and interval reassessment and monitoring conjointly with probation. In proposing alternative or new approaches, institutional, financial, procedural, and political forces may pose barriers and need to be considered. Finally, whether undertaking to streamline or expand services within a forensic evaluation system, it is proposed to avoid shortcuts, procedures, and strategies that may be more fiscally sound, but hold potential to compromise the integrity, accuracy, and quality of the forensic examination process. In competency to stand trial examinations, by way of example, the high importance of maintaining the integrity of this process in ensuring both due process of defendants and the accuracy of legal proceedings is underscored.

Forensic Psychiatry, Forensic Evaluation, Court Service