

Study Stresses Co-ordination of Mental Health Services

A recent study has determined that interjurisdictional and jurisdictional co-operation patterns produce positive results within forensic mental health services in Canada.

The study reviews and compares the forensic mental health services of the ten provincial and two territorial jurisdictions. The term "forensic mental health services" refers to the mental health services available to individuals who have become involved with the criminal justice system.

Each jurisdiction was asked to describe its present services as well as areas in which it might be lacking services. Information about mental health services within the federal system is provided by the author, as he is employed by the Correctional Service of Canada.

After reviewing both the federal and provincial systems, the study concludes that more could be done in the area of interjurisdictional co-operation. The author cites some positive examples already in existence, including the provision of services to the province of Saskatchewan by the federally operated Regional Psychiatric Centre in Saskatoon and the provision of services to the Correctional Service of Canada in Quebec by the Institut Philippe Pinel. The study recommends that all jurisdictions work together to reduce duplication and improve the utilization of existing resources.

In addition, the author emphasizes that better communication patterns seem to be fostered within jurisdictions where one individual co-ordinates the forensic mental health services. He suggests that the designation of a co-ordinator gives all employees a legitimate channel for communicating thoughts and concerns about forensic psychiatric services.

Currently, only British Columbia and Manitoba have centralized forensic mental health services coordinated by one person. The author found the most impressive organizational model to be British Columbia's Forensic Psychiatric Services Commission.

The author makes several other general observations after reviewing the information received. A basic level of mental health service (psychologist, visiting psychiatrist or crisis intervention) is available in most institutions of the Correctional Service of Canada. Intensive in-patient service is available in the Regional Psychiatric Centres in Abbotsford and Saskatoon, the Regional Treatment Centre in Kingston, and (through contract) the Institut Philippe Pinel in Quebec. In addition, the Atlantic Region has a 12-bed psychiatric unit in Dorchester Penitentiary and is currently studying a major redevelopment plan.

The study found that a great variety of forensic mental health services exist in provincial jurisdictions. The author concludes that there is no "ideal" model of service. He notes, however, that while services must be implemented to address the needs of individual jurisdictions, the needs of other jurisdictions must also be taken into consideration.

When surveyed for their views on the proposed changes to the Criminal Code and on the implications of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the jurisdictions expressed a variety of different concerns, and there was thus no clear consensus on these issues.

Gillies, R. (1990). Comparative Analysis of Forensic Mental Health Systems in Canada. Prepared for the Canadian College of Health Service Executives as a requirement for Fellowship.