

Mental Health and Managing Probation and Parole Clients in the Community

The main problems that I have experienced in the management of clients in the community with mental health problems has been the following:

- Clients with diagnosed mental health problems lack support from the Mental Health Service – The Southern Area Health Service is under-resourced, and insular, about how and why they accept some clients and reject others.
- Clients who present to our Service with suspected mental health problems, who may benefit from diagnosis and assessment and are referred, most often are not assessed. The criteria for assessment or intervention by the Mental Health Service appears to only be if they are at risk of self-harm, or of harming others – and therefore clients presenting to our service with tendencies towards psychosis or even depression are not assessed and therefore treated.
- Dual diagnosis (co-morbidity) clients are generally ignored by the Mental Health Service.
- Behavioural disorders such as borderline personality and anti-social disorders are refused treatment and rarely managed well.
- Most of my frustration stems from the observation that that there is no place for mental health or potential mental health clients – between an under-resourced Mental Health Service that has difficulty with providing a ‘service’ – and custody. I have had a mental health worker tell me that the best place for a client for whom I was seeking intervention and assessment was gaol.
- There are many clients we manage who may be more adequately and appropriately managed in the community by a Mental Health Service that is well resourced with psychiatrists, psychologists and skilled nurses.

I have written this very hurriedly because of the short notice and other pressures, but feel strongly about the poor service our community gives to mental health clients with behavioural problems. Most of them end up in the justice system, and this is often inappropriate.

I also do not mean to cause offence to the mental health service in my area, as I realise there are reasons beyond the control of some of the good people who work there. Especially as they have not had a right of reply to these concerns.

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