

Co-morbid mental health and alcohol and other drugs – Is it still in the too hard basket?

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Introduction / Issues: Health Services have a long history of working with people who have both a mental health disorder and alcohol and other drug (AOD) use or dependence. At times this has been successful, while others in this marginalised population have sometimes “fallen through the gap”. Despite the evidence base and guidelines available, patients have not always been able to access the treatment or assistance required.

Method / Approach: This presentation will highlight some projects undertaken to address identified problems in the management of co-occurring mental health and AOD issues.

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, in collaboration with the University of NSW has received funding for four projects;

1. A review of online/telephone resources to provide a readily accessible source of information for clinicians and their patients,
2. Development and review of specific *HealthPathways* (online tool - providing guidance on best clinical practice and referral options) for the management of people with co-occurring disorders,
3. Optimizing the use of electronic medical records by mental health and AOD Services to improve identification and management of patients with co-occurring disorders, and
4. Piloting multidisciplinary shared care plans for General Practitioners and specialist services in the management of patients with severe mental illness and AOD issues.

Key Findings: The projects are in the implementation stage, and some key issues are already being identified in relation to workforce development, clinical pathways and governance, which will provide opportunities to address some of the barriers currently experienced by patients/carers and clinicians.

Discussions and Conclusions: The findings, strategies to address issues identified by the individual projects, and evaluation of the interventions, will be presented and discussed.

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