

An audit of the Northern Territory Alcohol Mandatory Treatment program

CHRISTINE WATSON¹, ADAM PASTOR²

¹ *Top End Health Service Northern Territory Department of Health, Northern Territory Government, Darwin, Australia*

² *Department of Addiction Medicine St Vincents Hospital Melbourne and the SouthCity clinic, The Alfred Melbourne*

Presenter's email: Christine.watson@ntg.gov.au

Introduction: In 2013, in response to rising public concern over public drunkenness, the Northern Territory passed its Alcohol Mandatory Treatment Act which involved referral to the NT Alcohol Mandatory Treatment Program (NTAMTP) when police had taken a person into protective custody for intoxication three times in a two-month time period. The three objectives of the Act were to improve access to treatment, improve health and social functioning and the restoration of capacity.

Method: We conducted a retrospective file audit of all clients seen at DAAS over a three month period in 2015 (n=64). We reviewed the effectiveness of the NTAMTP by looking at clients' rates of being taken into protective custody for intoxication and of hospital emergency department presentations before and after participating in the NTAMTP. Client's health records were also reviewed to see if there was any evidence to suggest a reduction in heavy drinking after this program.

Results: Overall there was no difference in the number of emergency department presentations (mean difference 0.08, CI -0.55, 0.73) or number of episodes of protective custody (mean difference 0.06, CI -0.99, 1.12) in the 100 days at risk after a client had attended DAAS. At 9-months post-treatment, few clients showed evidence of being likely abstinent (n=2) or likely to be drinking less (n=1).

Discussions and Conclusions: Despite access to comprehensive treatment, we did not observe any measurable improvements on the drinking behaviors or health of clients after their participation in the NTMTP.

Implications for Practice or Policy:

This work contributes to our knowledge base regarding the limited efficacy of mandatory treatment models for those with substance use disorders.

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