

Creating positive experiences using NOCC Outcome Measures

The National Outcomes and Casemix Collection (NOCC) was commenced in mental health services in 2002. Its ongoing development and review, and support for its implementation through training delivered to the mental health workforce nationally, is the responsibility of the Australian Mental Health Outcomes and Classification Network (AMHOCN). The NOCC measures are mandatory and have become part of routine care, aiming to ensure that mental health services continue to understand, improve and are accountable for the effectiveness of the care that they provide. The NOCC measures include: the Health of the Nation Outcome Scales (HoNOS); Life Skills Profile 16 (LSP-16); and Phase of Care (FOC). The consumer-rated measures include: the Mental Health Inventory (MHI-38); Behavior and Symptom Identification Scale 32 (BASIS-32); and Kessler 10 Plus (K10+).

This project sought to explore positive experiences of providing the consumer-rated measures to mental health service consumers. The aim of the findings is to provide an impetus for the mental health workforce to increase their use of the measures with consumers and to support AMHOCN in promoting the value and positive use of the NOCC consumer-rated outcome measures within its training to the national mental health workforce.

Below is an overview of the key themes from this research, followed by recommendations for health professionals.

Help me complete the measures

All participants spoke about the challenges they faced when completing the measures and how their personal situation and preference impacted on their completion of the measures. Three subthemes were identified:

1. Think about what is going on for me the first time using the measure;
2. Helping me at a time when this is difficult; and
3. Preferences when completing the measures.

"There's only so much that you can say about your condition, particularly when you feel like you're at the very start of it ...I think it gave them a much deeper picture of what was going on when I was little hesitant to verbalize at the time."

"Tell me why I need to fill in this form. How is this going to help me in the moment? How is this helping me right now? When I'm feeling all so lost and don't know what I need."

Explain what is going on

Participants described their experiences of the various ways that they were offered and then used the measures with health professionals, and how this then influenced how they engaged with those health professionals. Two subthemes were apparent:

1. Not just an administrative exercise; and
2. Explaining the purpose is important.

"It makes me feel like the filling out the questionnaires is meaningful, like it actually means something that it's not just because I have worked out that she has to."

"Once I had an understanding of the purpose and how they can be useful to me and my journey and that they are for me, I actually started using them in the way they were meant to be used, but I had to have education around that.."

Being honest with yourself and others

A prominent perspective expressed by almost all participants was in how the act and process of completing the measures inherently challenged and confronted them to be honest with themselves and others about their circumstances. This occurred whether they were completing the measure alone and in private, or whether they were completing it with the health professional present, or when the health professional was asking them the questions directly. Two subthemes were identified:

1. Putting my feelings into a clear context; and
2. Taking control.

"It helps me to conceptualise where things are at because to me I find it validating. It's a validating tool."

"In some ways...especially when I had made a significant difference, for a brief moment, it can be exhilarating."

Talking about things important to me

Several participants expressed the desire for a shared dialogue with the health professional and having their support at-hand in case it was needed as part of the process of completing the measures. Some participants were particularly concerned that some questions may trigger distress. Others saw the health professional's presence as enhancing the transparency of the process and then enhancing the shared discussions that could then occur, either whilst they were completing the measures, or immediately after as part of their contact and therapeutic work with the health professional.

"It's always been part of our ongoing therapy. We just bring it out to just sort of check in, see how I'm feeling, where I'm sitting on those questions, so it's a measuring tool and it's just conversational."

Recommendations for Clinicians

One

Actively engage in a conversation with consumers around the consumer-rated measure and its implications.

By completing the consumer-rated measures, consumers in this study indicated that they felt actively engaged. It gave them a voice in the assessment process.

Two

Explain the purpose of the measures and identify the consumer's preferred method for completing.

Given their positive experiences of completing consumer-rated measures, the consumers in this study believe that these should be offered to all consumers. Based on a variety of experiences when completing the measure, they indicated different preferences for when and how they might complete them. Some expressed a desire to complete a measure privately, while others saw advantages to its completion with the clinician. Some consumers spoke about how this impacted their sense of trust and empowerment. The key is to ask each consumer what their preference is.

Three

Offer the measures in a way that engenders hope and the opportunity for recovery.

Throughout this study, consumers identified that the way the measures are presented is an opportunity for the clinician to build trust, rapport, and share a sense of hope for the possibility of change in the future. With the knowledge that the clinician is going to routinely offer the measures, it provides a sense that the clinician is working and striving *with* them, to check in and track progress. Knowing that the measures are not a 'one-off' reinforces the benefits of measuring change over time and gives a purpose to setting goals in their recovery-oriented journey.

Four

Discuss the consumer's ratings of the measures with them each time they are completed.

Consumers in this study found that clinicians who engage with curiosity and are interested in the person, help establish a sense of rapport. The completion of the measure, and discussion ensuing from the ratings, provides an opportunity for a much broader and richer discussion. Exploring the reasons for changes in ratings was found by consumers to be particularly useful

Five

Adopt an approach that encourages the consumer to reflect on their current situation and how it has changed over time.

The consumers in this study identified that the consumer-rated measures can be confronting but gave them an opportunity to reflect and gain perspective of their current situation, and an opportunity to be honest with themselves and others. Consumers indicated that the measures provide an opportunity for both the clinician and the consumer to track progress over time.

Six

Encourage consumers to explore the use of the measure for their own self-management and empowerment.

Consumers in this study saw the completion of the consumer-rated measures as an opportunity for personal reflection. It gives the chance to celebrate the good times and gain pride in their achievements, to be pleased when things are 'going the same' or to realise they are 'stuck' or that things are not going well. By encouraging the consumer to "hold the pen" they take a small step in empowering themselves in their recovery journey with the clinician.