

Appendix A:

Overview and Statement of Need - Mental Health and Disability Services Information Systems

Overview

According to the *President New Freedom Commission on Mental Health*:

Information technology is now available to support integrating electronic health record systems. Integrated systems can promote high quality, coordinated services by helping psychiatrists and other physicians, psychologists, social workers, nurses, and other health and human service providers communicate vital health information clearly, confidentially, and when it is needed.

The Institute of Medicine, the National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics, and the National Quality Forum have all proposed widely implementing a paperless, interoperable communications and information technology infrastructure as a way to improve and integrate the Nation's health care system. Mental health can lead this change.

Already, the Federal government is working to establish guidelines and standards to more effectively transmit, communicate, and protect health information. For example, by agreeing to use the same health messaging standards, pharmaceutical codes, imaging standards, and laboratory test names, the country is one giant step closer to speaking a common language and providing better patient care - thus leading the way to a more integrated health care system.

Consumers and families must be assured that their privacy and the confidentiality of their health information are well protected. If health care systems do not make substantial, front-end, ongoing investments to protect privacy, electronic health information systems are doomed to fail. Existing Federal regulations that balance privacy protections and the need for shared information within the health system, such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), must be constantly re-examined to ensure that they adequately address both provider and consumer needs.

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With the explosion of scientific advances, new treatments, breakthroughs in promoting health, and medical information, all providers must have high-speed electronic access to the latest evidence-based practice guidelines, best practice models, ongoing clinical trials, scientific research, and other health information.

Studies show that electronic health records improve quality, accountability, and cost-effectiveness of health care services. Enhancing communication between informed consumers and health care professionals improves their discussions about treatment

options and more knowledgeable decisions. Health care providers, including those in the mental health field, urgently need universal access to real-time, computer-based health records. Successful models of person-centered, integrated, comprehensive electronic health records already exist, such as the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) health record system.

The Commission recommends that HHS and VA lead a public-private effort to create and promote use of software for Internet access to privacy-protected, personal health information that consumers maintain and control. Consumers and families must be involved in designing, evaluating, and implementing the system that would enable them to personalize their records. The software and training should enable consumers to personalize their health information record through links to key portions of their health records, local consumer support groups, self-care trackers, advance directives, and directories of local service providers located in or near their own ZIP Codes. This personal health information system should include the following elements:

- Electronic copies of key portions of individual health information, including records from health care providers, laboratories, and pharmacies; personal health trackers; and advance directives, care reminders, and self-entered health information;
- Access to Internet assessment services and health information sources so that they can build a personalized health information library;
- Interface with a wide range of services and programs, including prescription, appointment scheduling and reminders, medication refills, participation in consumer and support groups, and alerts to new research findings and projects;
- Availability to the general public, consumers, and families; and
- Universal design to ensure access for people with sensory perceptual and physical disabilities and availability in a broad range of multilingual formats.”

Mental Health Information System Defined

“A mental health information system is a system for action: it should exist not simply for the purpose of gathering data, but also for enabling well-informed decision-making in all aspects of the mental health system.”

From: World Health Organization, Mental health information systems. (Mental Health Policy and Service Guidance Package, 2005)

“Knowledge and understanding about mental health and mental illness are essential for the public. The general public needs accurate and current information if there is to be community responsibility for the mentally ill and community provisions for mental health.”

From: Robert H. Felix, M.D., “Evolution of Community Mental Health Concepts” presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in 1956.

Major Reasons for a MHIS

Information is crucial for decision-making at all levels of the mental health system.

- Policy-makers need information to make the best use of scarce resources,
- Planners for the design of more efficient and effective services,
- Managers for the monitoring and evaluation of services, and
- Clinicians to provide appropriate, good quality, evidence-based care.

In the context of limited resources, increasing decentralization and changes to the financing of mental health care, the quality of such data is becoming even more important.

MHIS Q & A

- What is a mental health information system?
- What are the main stages of an MHIS?
- From where should information be collected?
- What types of information should be collected?
- Benefits of an MHIS

What is a MHIS?

A mental health information system (MHIS) is a system for collecting, processing, analyzing, disseminating and using information about a mental health service and the mental health needs of the population it serves.

The MHIS aims to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the mental health service and ensure more equitable delivery by enabling managers and service providers to make more informed decisions for improving the quality of care.

In short, an MHIS is a system for action: it exists not simply for the purpose of gathering data, but also for enabling decision-making in all aspects of the mental health system.

From where should information be collected?

Information should be collected from a variety of different mental health services. To make this possible, the appropriate systems need to be in place within these services.

The WHO has developed a model for an optimal mix of mental health services – the WHO “pyramid framework” –, which can be used to help organize the place of collection as well as the type of information that needs to be collected.

Types of Information

Planners need to consider each level of the service organization pyramid when deciding what information is required. Different types of information need to be processed at different levels within the MHIS, and it is important to consider the practicalities of how one level relates to another.

To help planners make these decisions, it is necessary to distinguish between the different types of information needed:

- Episode-level information is required to manage an individual episode of service contact – some refer to mental health vital signs, functional assessments, or outcomes measures;
- Case-level information is required to care for an individual service user;
- Facility-level information is required to manage the specific service facility (whether the facility is a specialist institution, a mental health unit in a general hospital, a community mental health team, or a primary health care (PHC) clinic); and
- Systems-level information is required to develop a policy and plan for the mental health system as a whole.

Benefits of MHIS

Information systems are an essential planning tool:

- they are a way of providing accurate, consistent information about a mental health service;
- they assist with coherent planning; and
- they are essential for policy implementation and evaluation.

Information systems are also a service delivery tool to assist service providers with recording and monitoring the needs of individual service users; they provide a means of reporting the interventions that are used, and can be linked to the ongoing improvement of service quality.

Information systems improve effectiveness by enabling the measurement of indicators explicitly determined by the policy framework of the mental health service.

They also enable effective monitoring of the clinical interventions that are used and they improve efficiency by measuring how well a service is using its resources.

As a tool for measuring need and coverage, the MHIS addresses a central challenge facing the mental health service, namely, providing equitable care with scarce resources.