

A Better Way to Help People With Serious Mental Illnesses who Commit Minor Crimes

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Natural Partners

- Democrats
- Republicans
- Independents
- Green People
- Libertarians
- Wigs

Natural Partners

- Police Officers
- Detention Officers
- Judges
- Paramedics
- Emergency Services Workers
- Firefighters
- Community Mental Health Workers

More Natural Partners

- NAMI
- MH America
- MH Professionals
- CMHC's
- Public Defenders

Who Will Need Convincing?

- Business Owners
- Police Departments
- Elected Judges
- District Attorneys
- Joe and Jill Lunchpail

Types of Risk

- Violence to Others and Public Safety
- Suicide
- Escape
- Economic (i.e., Driving Business away from the Downtown Business Districts)
- Family Finances
- Embarrassing Politicians (e.g., Judges and DA's)

Ohio's Advantages

- Excellent Community Mental Health System (compared to most other states)
- Leadership
- Political Support
- History of Litigation
- Outstanding Forensic Evaluators
- Some Unity of Purpose in Ohio's Forensic MH System – e.g., Annual Conference

Case Example

- Joel has schizophrenia
- He is always symptomatic, but usually mildly so
- He likes to hang out in front of Juana's Bodega
- Juana is nice to him, gives him food and a few bucks to sweep the parking lot
- Juana is not rich, and her business is always a few days away from going under

Case example (cont.)

- Sometimes Joel's symptoms worsen
- He has been known to scream and cuss
- Joel never hurts anyone...
- But he scares away customers
- Juana doesn't know what to do
- Finally, she calls the police
- Police gently get Joel to move to a nearby park

Case Example (cont.) (cont.)

- Joel immediately returns to Juana's Bodega
- Juana calls the police again
- This time, they have no choice but to take Joel into custody. Two very expensive options:
 - Emergency Department
 - Jail

How Will This Go?

- Like everything else, it depends
- CIT or not CIT??????
- Crisis resources vary greatly
- New options exist
 - Warm lines
 - Peer-run Drop-in Centers
 - One stop shopping (e.g., Miami-Dade)

Emergency Departments

- Often tie up police officers for hours
- Patients like Joel cause turmoil and chaos in the E.R.
- Somebody has to pay a whole lot of money for the episode
- In many states, Joel might be in the E.R. for several days
- There are lots of “Joels”

Jails

- Don't believe Andy of Mayberry – jails really don't want Joel.
- Detainees with SMI cost even more per day than other detainees and inmates.
- Once Joel enters the Criminal Justice System, he is likely to lose days, weeks, or months of freedom, at great public cost, with no federal reimbursement.
- Jail always makes Joel much worse.

Crisis Services

- Can be a place, a service, or both
- Lower cost
- One-stop shopping for police, parents, and people in crisis
- Joel likely has a history of trauma, and needs a safe place to be
- Needs backup if Joel turns out to be violent towards others
- Consider consumer-run drop-in centers

Why Not Send Them to a Psychiatric Hospital?

- They probably don't need it
- It costs a bloody fortune
- Other people actually need the bed
- At least 7 states have been sued over waiting lists for incompetent defendants
- Why waste a bed on offenders who do not have a clinical need for inpatient treatment and pose no serious risk to public safety

Training

- Ohio has done a great job with CIT
- CIT is a much better way of making decisions, but...
- Decisions requires options
- CIT requires someplace to send people in crisis
- Need to extend CIT to even more communities
- Need for rural models of CIT
- More importantly, CIT officers needs referral options

Training (cont.)

- Police are not the only first responders
- Pay attention to fire and rescue, paramedics, private ambulance services, and emergency services
- Are rules conducive to avoiding E.R. and jail?

What Responders Face

- Limited governmental resources
- Selfishness and heroic selflessness among victims and members of the community
- Unappreciative recipients of assistance
- No way to train people for everything
- System seems uncaring – “We’re out here all alone.”

No Offense, Doc

- Over half of all psychotropic medications are prescribed by non-psychiatrists
- Some of them do it well
- Some do not
- Many people with SMI have no access to a psychiatrist
- Need for telephonic consultation service

What needs to Be Done?

- Consensus Among Stakeholders (sorry for the cliché)
- Legislation requiring outpatient restoration of defendants who do not meet civil commitment criteria and would otherwise be eligible for bail or bond
- Better use of probation
- Expansion of CIT and MH Courts
- Funding for expansion of crisis services

What needs to Be Done?

- Training for all first responders
- Cross-training between MH, CJ, and other first responders
- Consider ways to assist families who want to take care of loved ones in crisis

What Providers Need: Workplace Coping Mechanisms

- When one victory has to outweigh ten defeats
- Set limits
- Peer support
- Vacations
- Get and take supervision
- Give each other a break

What Consumers Need

- Time
- Empathy
- Safety
- A chance to fail

Responding to High-Profile Events
Involving Violence Perpetrated by
Persons with Real or Alleged SMI

What Makes an Incident Likely to Be Picked Up by the Media?

- Sensational nature of the incident
- Perceived failure of the mental health system to provide appropriate treatment to this person, i.e., they “slipped through the cracks”
- Perceived failure of legislators to provide adequate funding to law enforcement or mental health treatment
- Perceived failure of mental health system in collaborating with law enforcement and other criminal justice agencies

Short Term Strategies

- Gather the facts
- Know the regulations that govern the incident (e.g. FERPA, etc.)
- Convene an appropriate team to oversee the short-term and long-term responses
 - » Collaborate with criminal justice partners
 - » Collaborate with executive, judicial, and legislative stakeholders
- Manage the short-term message for the media
 - » Basic talking points for mental health commissioners in situations in which they must publicly respond to tragedies involving violent crimes committed by individuals with mental illnesses
 - » Prepare responses to crime victims
- Manage the message for the executive and legislative supervisors

Longer Term Strategies

- Review policies and procedures that impacted the event
- Develop executive proposals that detail needed changes in response to the incident
- Be vigilant about stigma and discrimination
- Work with criminal justice partners, legislators and others to manage the long-term strategy
- Implement strategies for addressing NGRI cases
- Implement strategies for working with crime victims

Know the Facts

- SMI does not increase risk of gun crime
- Perpetrator or victim?
- Treatment
- Scapegoating of people with SMI
- False attributions re: violence or inaccurate claims that the perpetrator was a person with mental illness

Speaking to the Media

- One voice
- Don't panic
- Spend a few minutes preparing what you want to say
- Maximum of 5 talking points (3x5 card)
- Remember, the question is seldom on air.
- Don't get snookered into asking a trick question

Thank You

- For inviting me
- For the excellent work you do
- For your willingness to find ways to do it even better

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