

Breakout Session B: Maintaining EBP Fidelity and Quality

Overview

This session discussed the importance of fidelity and quality in evidence based practice. After a general discussion of quality and evidence based practices two different sites discussed what they've done to assure quality. One county discussed quality assurance in a system with a limited data capacity while the another county discussed quality assurance in a system with a vast data system.

Major Themes

Defining Quality

The term *quality* can mean many different things to many different people. Clients, officers, community, legislators, providers, and other stakeholders understand quality in various ways. "Quality is often in the eye of the beholder". In evidence based practices we must be careful to clearly define what we mean by quality and how to recognize it. Sometimes this can be accomplished through the use of data and other times it can be accomplished through more indirect means. Participants described quality as:

- Using data to drive decisions throughout the entire business model (e.g., alignment with strategic planning, client services, budgeting, human resources)
- Ability to measure consistency of your agency and continually evaluate how the agency (and its parts) is doing
- Use of EBP consistent language and expectations with consistent application of EBP principles
- Internal process in which everyone knows their roles in quality and a culture of quality exists
 - "The department goal is *x* and these are the processes I do to shoot for *x*. I can measure what I'm doing and compare it to others. I understand how it all fits in."
 - People assume responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the quality of their service delivery.
- External verification of internal processes and desired outcomes

Strategic Planning

As sites discussed their internal strategic planning processes several different approaches were mentioned. Some sites mentioned doing strategic planning in the executive management level and not with line level staff. Other sites mentioned the benefits of bringing in a neutral facilitator and including all levels of staff in addition to key stakeholders (e.g., judges). Many participants discussed the importance of aligning with the agency's mission and vision statements. Some sites jumped into EBP without having it in their agency's mission and vision statements while others used these statements as the driving force for EBP. Participants agreed it is important to discuss where the agency wants to be, articulate its vision of quality, and share this image of quality with stakeholders.

Be Realistic and Ask Questions

One of the major themes discussed throughout the session was to be realistic. A myth of excellence exists within agencies. The more important question is what does that look like. It is necessary to understand the level of skills in an agency and set clear expectations of quality. The challenges of change can be overwhelming. It is necessary to stress the importance of mining the details and never assume what you wanted to happen is happening. Be sure to measure the fidelity of implementation to know if it is actually happening. Doing things the way they've always been done is not necessarily effective management. Often effective management requires one to question how individuals and agencies can do better.

Keep it Simple, Consistent and Personal

Set a reasonable number of core goals for staff and accept that it is ok to take things away. This is critical to align daily work with an agency's mission and vision. The feedback loop is essential to achieving goals. It helps when the people who do the auditing discuss it with those audited. This brings the theory to reality with specific and concrete examples. It also strengthens the knowledge base and skill sets within the agency. When a transparent system exists individuals and agencies can compare themselves to others and immediately know how they are doing. This increases the amount of professionalism and accountability within the agency. While developing the specific measures can be a messy process it is worth it to narrow it down to a few key measures everyone can focus on and digest.

Concluding Thoughts

In a data rich system or in one of limited data capacity it is imperative to be clear and realistic. When implementing EBP it is essential to include all levels of staff in the process and articulate what quality will look like. Then, measure the relevant practices and feedback the information in a personal way. Through the feedback loop each and every member of the agency is accountable for achieving the desired outcomes in a clear and direct way. This builds a culture of quality and encourages all staff to do the best job possible.