

Plenary B: Preparing Frontline Supervisors for EBP Leadership

General overview

This plenary session described three approaches that organizations have taken with respect to developing front-line supervisors and involving them in the implementation of evidence-based practices. The three presenters talked about the 3 very different approaches that their organization had employed in building the capacity of supervisors.

Major Themes

Leadership

A major theme discussed in all 3 presentations was the theme of leadership. Marion County (IN) approached the issue from a staff development perspective, utilizing a leadership institute program that prepares supervisors to become leaders. Maricopa County (AZ) adopted an approach that emphasizes handing some decision-making responsibilities over to supervisors, through a mid-managers group that helps to guide EBP implementation. Finally, Maryland described ways in which responsibilities were clarified for supervisors, relationships with managers were improved, and innovation was encouraged.

Training

An additional theme of the plenary was the issue of training. The group discussed that supervisors are in a unique position of having to know the topic areas, model and coach line staff in good practices, and to be the primary actors in quality assurance efforts. Big training needs identified by the group include:

- Coaching and mentoring line staff
- Communication and management
- Accountability and Quality Assurance -- being able to give people outcome data
- Training for the next level up-- the next promotion

Lessening the Burden

Because of their unique position and their increasing workload in implementing EBP, many attendees wanted to know what other departments had done to lessen the load upon supervisors. Some specific ideas included:

- Reducing the frequency of case audits and performance appraisals
- Spreading some training responsibilities to line officers – who can train their peers
- Another department has developed a mentoring program in which line staff are identified to take over some supervisor responsibilities
 - This requires a 6 month commitment so that staff cannot renege
- Others observed that taking away wasn't always as necessary as being clear about what is important, what the priorities are. One department gave an example of ranking the top 3 tasks that a supervisor must complete.

Concluding Thoughts

Front line supervisors are in a unique and powerful position with an organization. Empowering them and providing them with the correct training is a vital part of making sure that the organization implements best practices and does so with fidelity. Front-line supervisors are uniquely aware of the challenges of doing business and the issues that face line staff and so, when empowered, can be key communicators and problem-solvers in the change process.