

Newsletter

July, 2005



The Incompatible Uses of Performance Data

Data often serves many masters. In behavioral health, data is commonly brought into service for regulatory compliance, advocacy, and performance improvement purposes. Data is a focal point of the regulatory compliance process with accreditation bodies and governmental entities. Data is also employed for advocacy purposes by individual organizations with their Boards and funding sources. At the broader level, professional associations use data to lobby legislators and leaders in local and state government. Finally, data is intricately entwined with performance improvement activities in virtually all service delivery settings.

Can the same data simultaneously be used for all three purposes? Probably not. There are a number of factors that may limit its applicability. One factor relates to the standard the data should be held to. While all data should be as valid and as reliable as possible, the fact is that practical and financial limitations in applied settings prevent data from being gathered and analyzed under laboratory conditions. For regulatory compliance, the standard of rigor should be very high because funding and licensing decisions may hinge on the integrity of the information under review. A less rigorous standard might apply to advocacy, where the data will be infused with many other competing sources of data to arrive at decisions. Performance improvement data requires the least rigorous standard because all such data should be used in conjunction with other sources of information to examine and understand reported findings. In that sense, data used for performance improvement should be regarded as hypotheses to be explored. Good performance improvement practice involves testing those hypotheses liberally through pilot projects to examine the impact of corrective interventions.

Another dimension is the "credibility" factor. Clinician ratings may have limited value as a tool in regulatory compliance since such data tends to be looked upon by decision-makers with some caution. Similarly, data that is analyzed by regulatory entities tends to be dismissed by providers as inaccurate and unreliable.

A number of other factors impinge upon the degree to which data can cross functions. Does this mean data should never be used for more than one purpose? No. However, it does mean that careful consideration needs to be given to these factors when data is being used to make decisions. The nature of the demands upon the data should dictate how it is gathered, analyzed, and reported. In that manner, data will not extend beyond its appropriate boundaries.

Upcoming Conferences and Presentations

BPS President Paul Lefkovitz will be presenting at some upcoming conferences. On August 7, he will be conducting workshops on benchmarking at the Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare (AABH) annual conference in Tucson, Arizona. On August 10, he will be presenting a process benchmarking workshop at the Mental Health Corporations of America (MHCA) conference in Newport Beach, California. He conducted a process benchmarking workshop at the most recent MHCA quarterly meeting and it was so well-received that he was asked to conduct more of these at future meetings.

Strategy-Driven Performance Management

We have been very busy with a number of clients in helping them to adopt a strategy-driven performance management model. The model is based on the observation that many performance measurement systems produce data that is not of great value and interest to organizational leaders. Also, it is our observation that performance data only rarely drives organizational decisions. We believe that is due to a disconnect between organizational vision and performance measurement. BPS has developed a model, using copyrighted assessment instruments and tools to revamp the organization's performance management process and infuse it with greater relevance and impact. Please let us know if you are interested in learning more.

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Contact Us!

We want to create an active and vibrant community of individuals and organizations interested in performance management, outcomes, and benchmarking. If you have thoughts, ideas, suggestions, tips, or questions, we'd like to hear from you. Please feel free to contact us at info@bpsys.org.

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