

Combination of HoNOS with Mental Health Descriptors

Sir: We in Midlothian Mental Health Services propose to combine the first 11 of the Health of the Nation Outcome Scales (HoNOS) with Mental Health Descriptors, a twenty-four item checklist developed for use by the Medical Advisers to the Benefits Agency Medical Service (BAMS).

The combined scales and descriptors would be used at points of referral to our service, discharge from community care, admission to in-patient treatment, discharge from in-patient treatment, and/or at review by our various teams (usually every three to six months).

The time frame for the HoNOS would be two weeks, as it would for Mental Health Descriptors. The time frame for Mental Health Descriptors used by the BAMS (1994) is six months and it is designed to look at grounds for incapacity in which a score of 10 or more for six months or more renders the person eligible for Incapacity Benefit on Mental Health grounds alone.

The perceived advantage of using Mental Health Descriptors instead of Scale 12 (occupation and activities in HoNOS) would be that it provides a finer measure of disability than the four-point HoNOS. The significance of the

score of 10, albeit with a two-week time frame, would remain much the same as when used by BAMS, and empirically it correlates fairly well with the patients' ability to function at work or in a work like setting.

A copy of the scales and descriptors are available from the author upon request. The form is structured to be usable with a formic scanner to input onto an electronic database.

If any reader is using Mental Health Descriptors in this way I would be pleased to discuss and possibly collaborate. I would also like to hear of other alternatives to Scale 12 besides RFS (Role Functioning Scales) mentioned in Chapter 4 of Wing, Curtis and Beevor's Report (1996).

BENEFITS AGENCY (1994) *Medical Assessment for Incapacity Benefit*, October. London: Department of Social Security.

WING, J. K., CURTIS, R. H. & BEEVOR, A. S. (1996) *HoNOS: Health of the Nation Outcome Scales. Report on Research and Development, July 1993-December 1995*. London: College Research Unit, Royal College of Psychiatry.

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