



Research Summary



ENSURING THE INTEGRITY OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY SUPERVISION

Question: How can correctional agencies ensure the integrity of effective community supervision?

Background: There is a substantial body of research evidence indicating correctional programs that adhere to the principles of Risk, Need, and Responsivity (RNR) lead to significant reductions in reoffending. The Risk principle refers to matching the level of service to the risk level of the offender. The Need principle refers to targeting those offender needs that are related to reoffending. The Responsivity principle refers to ensuring that the programs are cognitive-behavioural in nature and delivered in a manner that is responsive to the learning style of the offenders.

Translating the research into system-wide everyday correctional practice has proven difficult. One of the primary challenges has been the difficulty of ensuring the integrity of the treatment program or service. Integrity refers to the degree to which all of the aspects of the rehabilitative services adhere to the RNR principles (e.g., content of the program, intervention techniques used, model and style of delivery method, and the various factors around implementing the service such as staff training and organizational support).

Facing increased pressure to implement effective evidence-based community

supervision, many correctional agencies now realize there is more involved than generating general policies and procedures that adhere to the RNR principles. They must also consider how well community supervision is implemented in the organization including how to foster evidence-based skills in the staff that provide the services directly to the offenders. With little research to guide agencies in the development and implementation of evidence-based community supervision, there is a need to provide concrete guidance to those seeking to bring such practices to community supervision.

Method: A careful examination of the factors that led to the successful implementation of a comprehensive RNR-based model of community supervision (see *Research Summary*, 2010, Vol. 15, No. 3) permitted the identification of the various threats to its integrity.

Answer: Ensuring integrity requires that correctional agencies recognize that a comprehensive strategy is required to maximize adherence to the RNR principles. Enhancing integrity begins with the development of the program and service delivery model. The model of community supervision including its overall purpose and general theory of offender change must be integrated and congruent with the RNR

principles. The integrity of community supervision is further enhanced when the theoretical framework is explicitly and concretely linked to the ‘nuts and bolts’ of supervision (e.g., intervention techniques and what to do during supervision meetings).

This alone, however, does not guarantee integrity. The RNR model of community supervision that was examined found the following to be important: a) staff training includes concrete links between theory and practice, b) emphasis on skill development via the learning of core concepts and skills, c) practical exercises on the how to apply them in their everyday work and d) on-going clinical support for the reinforcement and refinement of newly acquired skills.

Policy Implications:

1. The integrity of effective correctional programs is founded in their adherence to the RNR principles. Minimally, when developing a treatment program or rehabilitative service, correctional agencies must ensure that there is a theoretically-based coherent model with concrete and explicit links to practical everyday services.

2. Implementing services with integrity requires a combination of pre-existing RNR-based jurisdictional requirements (e.g., the use of a risk-need offender assessment instrument; *Research Summary*, 2008, Vol. 13, No. 2), practical skills-based training coupled with on-going clinical support to enhance and maintain staff skills.
3. In order to gain a better understanding of effective implementation, efforts are needed to more closely examine the behaviours of the change agents during their service delivery. For example, agencies may audiotape or sit in on interviews to observe adherence to RNR.

Source: Bourgon, G., Bonta, J., Ruge, T., Scott, T-L, & Yessine, A.K. (2010). Program design, implementation, and evaluation in “real world” community corrections. *Federal Probation*, 74, 2-15.

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