Access to Services in the Substance Abuse Treatment System

Variations by Facility Characteristics

Margaret T. Lee, Sharon Reif, Grant A. Ritter, Helen J. Levine, and Constance M. Horgan

Abstract. In view of the importance of type and intensity of services during substance abuse treatment, this chapter looks at treatment and support services that substance abuse clients have access to during treatment. Trends in services over recent years are described. Services available to clients in the current treatment system are reviewed. Several facility characteristics affecting access to services are examined. Different ways of defining access to services are discussed. Findings from the Alcohol and Drug Services Study are used to illustrate service patterns in the national substance abuse treatment system. Variations in service patterns by facility characteristics such as type of care, treatment setting, ownership, percent of facility dependence on public revenue, and level of affiliation are analyzed. The implication is that clients who enter into treatment at different types of facilities are likely to have access to certain types of services.

1. Introduction

Effective quality of care is dependent upon making services accessible to clients who need them. Substance abusers often suffer from a variety of social and health problems, including unemployment, poor family relations, mental health problems, and legal problems, in addition to being chemically dependent. Therefore, a network of services is needed during treatment, including treatment services that are directly oriented toward treating alcohol or drug abuse, or both, and wraparound or support services that are directed toward concomitant problems. Treatment out-

Margaret T. Lee, Sharon Reif, Grant A. Ritter, Helen J. Levine, and Constance M. Horgan • Schneider Institute for Health Policy, Heller Graduate School, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts 02454-9110.

Come is more than the mere elimination or reduction of substance abuse. It generally includes measures of improvement in various aspects of the client’s life. Consequently, various services are needed in addition to drug and alcohol treatment. Although treatment programs recognize the multiple needs of clients and have attempted to increase the diversity of services offered, most programs do not offer services to meet all the needs of clients. Some offer certain services on site while others may be provided off site on a contractual basis. Substance abuse treatment programs tend to offer basic services and some may supplement these with wraparound or support services.

There is accumulating research that supports the relationship between the range and quality of services made accessible to clients during treatment and treatment outcomes.\textsuperscript{1,2,3} Abbott et al.\textsuperscript{4} found that a sample of drug clients who received a variety of services improved in all of the ASI problem areas at 6-month follow-up, with the exception of medical and family/social areas. Clients showed decreased alcohol and drug use and improvement in the psychological, employment, and legal areas.

Furthermore, the number of services received in the areas of medical, employment, family, and psychiatric care has been significantly and positively related to better posttreatment social adjustment. There have been findings indicating that certain types of services may help in one outcome area, while not having impact on another outcome area. Data from 22 treatment programs in the Philadelphia area showed that the quantity of services received during treatment was positively associated with posttreatment social adjustment, while a greater number of services was only slightly associated with a reduction in posttreatment substance use. It appeared that drug use severity at admission was the most significant predictor of recurrent substance use posttreatment.\textsuperscript{5}

In view of the importance of type and intensity of services during substance abuse treatment, this chapter looks at treatment and support services that substance abuse clients have access to during treatment. Trends in services over recent years and services available to clients in the current treatment system are described. Several facility characteristics affecting access to services are examined. Different ways of defining access are discussed. Findings from the Alcohol and Drug Services Study, funded by contract #283-92-8331 from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), are used to illustrate service patterns in the national substance abuse treatment system. Variations in service patterns by facility characteristics are discussed. The implication is that clients who enter into treatment at different types of facilities are likely to have access to certain types of services.

2. Trends in Declining Services

Despite the importance of the number and intensity of services for positive treatment outcomes, there is evidence that the extent of substance abuse services has declined over the years.\textsuperscript{5,7} Generally, wraparound services or support services such as employment and legal services are not offered as often as treatment services such as individual therapy, group therapy, and alcohol and drug services. This