Status of Interagency Cooperation between Interdisciplinary Clinics or Hospitals and the Public Schools

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ABSTRACT: Since public schools are now mandated to provide a large and varied range of clinical services to handicapped school children, a survey was conducted of 26 interdisciplinary UAF clinics and hospitals in regard to the types of services which they offer to public school children and the extent to which coordination of such services has been developed. Results suggest that diagnosis or evaluation is the primary reason for referral but that a wide variety of community outreach services are both requested by the schools and offered by interdisciplinary hospital and clinic staff. These services are described and the implications for future interagency cooperation are discussed.

While public schools are now mandated to serve all handicapped children, it was never intended that their services be provided solely in the school setting. Provision was made very clearly in federal law that other public and private agencies would continue to offer such services as might be appropriate. This law has required, however, that the delivery of these services be coordinated in a formal sense through interagency cooperative agreements, which delimit the responsibilities of the schools and other health or child care agencies in regard to the various needs of handicapped children which fall under the purview of both. These agreements may be entered into at the state or local school district level. Potentially, some very troublesome issues can arise in determining exactly where the responsibilities of schools end and those of another agency begin, in serving some types of handicapped

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children. Despite this, there are relatively few precedents or guidelines for effecting interagency cooperation.

The problems which can arise are several. Not only are there basic questions about the efficacy of treatment by other professionals, such as psychiatrists or pediatricians, on school progress, but recent data suggest that extremely little similarity exists between special education categories and those diagnostic systems used by other professions. It has also been shown that usefulness of written reports from clinic settings, for example, is quite limited in terms of usefulness in education decision making. Lastly, survey of over 2000 handicapped school children and adolescents referred for evaluation or treatment to hospitals, clinics and other outside agencies suggests that important case data or referral information are often unknown or go unreported between agencies.

For these reasons, it was decided to assess the present status of interagency cooperation between public schools and a sample of interdisciplinary hospitals or clinics. University Affiliated Facilities (UAF) for Developmental Disabilities were chosen as the basis for this survey for a number of reasons. UAFs are a federal network of interdisciplinary clinics, hospitals or similar agencies whose purpose is primarily interdisciplinary training in developmental disabilities. They are thus likely to emphasize interagency cooperation and are widely distributed geographically across several states. Each is also required to have a special education faculty or staff member whose responsibility is not only to supervise training of education students but to coordinate or assist in the training of professionals in other disciplines in relation to the school problems of children or adolescents who are treated or evaluated at the UAF setting. It should also be noted that a wide variety of handicapped children are seen at each UAF and that public schools are a significant source of referrals for UAF services.

The purpose of the survey was not only to assess the status of interagency cooperation between these UAF clinical settings and local school districts, but to pinpoint possible problems or issues related to establishing formal interagency cooperative agreements. Such data is essential to the task of further development of policies or procedures concerning such agreements.

**Method**

There were 38 UAF programs at the time of the study with identified special education components. In the summer of 1980, an open-ended questionnaire