Improving risk management for violence in mental health services: a multimethods approach

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Declared competing interests of authors: none

Published November 2016
DOI: 10.3310/pgfar04160
Plain English summary

Violence risk management in mental health services
Programme Grants for Applied Research 2016; Vol. 4: No. 16
DOI: 10.3310/pgfar04160

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Plain English summary

There is considerable public concern over the risk of harm from mentally ill people, and patients are sometimes stigmatised as a result. Our aim in this programme was to improve the accuracy of clinicians’ risk assessments and risk management. In the early stages we found that too much importance was placed on complicated mathematical scores of risk, which are often wrong. This approach can work better if the clinician combines this method with observing the problems that occur during rehabilitation, such as housing difficulties, poor social support, misusing drugs and alcohol and not continuing with treatment. These were the most important problems to deal with, especially if they directly caused violence.

We developed a new model of risk assessment and management using Bayesian networks. These take into account the factors that cause violence. These are the factors that clinicians must try to change if they want to prevent violence from happening. The model was based on the research evidence that we built up throughout the programme. It is currently in a preliminary format on a laptop computer, ready for developing software that can be used by clinicians in the future in the form of an application (app) after further programming. We have tested it with clinicians and service users, who have found it very useful and who have made important contributions to its development in the next stage.
Programme Grants for Applied Research

ISSN 2050-4322 (Print)
ISSN 2050-4330 (Online)

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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by PGfAR as project number RP-PG-0407-10500. The contractual start date was in July 2008. The final report began editorial review in July 2014 and was accepted for publication in June 2015. As the funder, the PGfAR programme agreed the research questions and study designs in advance with the investigators. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The PGfAR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors’ report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, CCF, NETSCC, PGfAR or the Department of Health. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the PGfAR programme or the Department of Health.

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