

Evaluating mental health decision units in acute care pathways (DECISION): a quasi-experimental, qualitative and health economic evaluation

Steve Gillard,^{1*} Katie Anderson,¹ Geraldine Clarke,² Chloe Crowe,³ Lucy Goldsmith,⁴ Heather Jarman,⁵ Sonia Johnson,⁶ Jo Lomani,¹ David McDaid,⁷ Paris Pariza,² A-La Park,⁷ Jared Smith,⁴ Kati Turner⁴ and Heather Yoeli¹

¹School of Health and Psychological Sciences, City, University of London, London, UK

²Improvement Analytics Unit, Health Foundation, London, UK

³Adult Acute Mental Health Services, North East London NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK

⁴Population Health Research Institute, St George's, University of London, London, UK

⁵Emergency Department Clinical Research Unit, St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK

⁶Division of Psychiatry, University College London, London, UK

⁷Care Policy and Evaluation Centre, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK

*Corresponding author steven.gillard@city.ac.uk

Disclosure of interests

Full disclosure of interests: Completed ICMJE forms for all authors, including all related interests, are available in the toolkit on the NIHR Journals Library report publication page at <https://doi.org/10.3310/PBSM2274>.

Primary conflicts of interest: None declared.

Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research, or similar, and contains language that may offend some readers.

Published December 2023
DOI: 10.3310/PBSM2274

Plain language summary

Evaluating mental health decision units in acute care pathways (DECISION): a quasi-experimental, qualitative and health economic evaluation

Health and Social Care Delivery Research 2023; Vol. 11: No. 25
DOI: 10.3310/PBSM2274

NIHR Journals Library www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk

Plain language summary

People who experience mental health crises often go to a hospital emergency department and can be admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Emergency departments and psychiatric wards are not always the best environments for supporting people in a crisis. Emergency departments are overcrowded and waits can be very long; psychiatric wards are also very busy. Psychiatric decision units have been introduced to reduce pressure and improve experiences of crisis care. Psychiatric decision units are short-stay hospital-based units where people can be assessed and signposted to the most appropriate care. This study aimed to evaluate the effect of psychiatric decision units on emergency department visits, psychiatric admissions and the cost of mental health care, and to consider the best way for psychiatric decision units to be structured.

We looked at research on similar units internationally and identified all psychiatric decision units in England. We evaluated the impact of psychiatric decision units on four mental health NHS trusts on emergency department visits and psychiatric admissions by examining electronic patient records in the 2 years before and after units opened, and by comparing records in areas with and without psychiatric decision units using data from NHS Digital. We compared mental health services used by people in the 9 months before and after their first psychiatric decision unit stay. We interviewed people about their experiences of the psychiatric decision unit and crisis care. We also interviewed staff working on and referring people to psychiatric decision units.

There were some reductions in psychiatric admissions, emergency department visits and wait times following opening of psychiatric decision units. The resulting cost savings were small and did not outweigh the costs of running psychiatric decision units. People mostly found units safe, calming and supportive, except where they were discharged too quickly. Psychiatric decision units worked best to reduce psychiatric admissions and improve quality of crisis care where stays were longer and staffing levels higher. Psychiatric decision units had more impact on emergency departments where they were larger and stays were shorter.

Health and Social Care Delivery Research

ISSN 2755-0060 (Print)

ISSN 2755-0079 (Online)

Health and Social Care Delivery Research (HSDR) was launched in 2013 and is indexed by Europe PMC, DOAJ, INAHTA, Ulrichsweb™ (ProQuest LLC, Ann Arbor, MI, USA), NCBI Bookshelf and MEDLINE.

This journal is a member of and subscribes to the principles of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (www.publicationethics.org/).

Editorial contact: journals.library@nihr.ac.uk

This journal was previously published as *Health Services and Delivery Research* (Volumes 1–9); ISSN 2050-4349 (print), ISSN 2050-4357 (online)

The full HSDR archive is freely available to view online at www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hsdr.

Criteria for inclusion in the *Health and Social Care Delivery Research* journal

Reports are published in *Health and Social Care Delivery Research* (HSDR) if (1) they have resulted from work for the HSDR programme, and (2) they are of a sufficiently high scientific quality as assessed by the reviewers and editors.

HSDR programme

The HSDR programme funds research to produce evidence to impact on the quality, accessibility and organisation of health and social care services. This includes evaluations of how the NHS and social care might improve delivery of services.

For more information about the HSDR programme please visit the website at <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/explore-nihr/funding-programmes/health-and-social-care-delivery-research.htm>.

This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HSDR programme or one of its preceding programmes as award number 17/49/70. The contractual start date was in March 2019. The final report began editorial review in November 2021 and was accepted for publication in September 2022. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HSDR 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 and Care 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, the HSDR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care. 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, the HSDR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

Copyright © 2023 Gillard *et al.* This work was produced by Gillard *et al.* under the terms of a commissioning contract issued by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. This is an Open Access publication distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 4.0 licence, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, reproduction and adaptation in any medium and for any purpose provided that it is properly attributed. See: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. For attribution the title, original author(s), the publication source – NIHR Journals Library, and the DOI of the publication must be cited.

Published by the NIHR Journals Library (www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk), produced by Newgen Digitalworks Pvt Ltd, Chennai, India (www.newgen.co).

NIHR Journals Library Editor-in-Chief

Dr Cat Chatfield Director of Health Services Research UK

NIHR Journals Library Editors

Professor Andrée Le May Chair of NIHR Journals Library Editorial Group (HSDR, PGfAR, PHR journals) and Editor-in-Chief of HSDR, PGfAR, PHR journals

Dr Peter Davidson Interim Chair of HTA and EME Editorial Board, Consultant Advisor, School of Healthcare Enterprise and Innovation, University of Southampton, UK

Professor Matthias Beck Professor of Management, Cork University Business School, Department of Management and Marketing, University College Cork, Ireland

Dr Tessa Crilly Director, Crystal Blue Consulting Ltd, UK

Dr Eugenia Cronin Consultant in Public Health, Delta Public Health Consulting Ltd, UK

Ms Tara Lamont Senior Adviser, School of Healthcare Enterprise and Innovation, University of Southampton, UK

Dr Catriona McDaid Reader in Trials, Department of Health Sciences, University of York, UK

Professor William McGuire Professor of Child Health, Hull York Medical School, University of York, UK

Professor Geoffrey Meads Emeritus Professor of Wellbeing Research, University of Winchester, UK

Professor James Raftery Professor of Health Technology Assessment, School of Healthcare Enterprise and Innovation, University of Southampton, UK

Dr Rob Riemsma Consultant Advisor, School of Healthcare Enterprise and Innovation, University of Southampton, UK

Professor Helen Roberts Professor of Child Health Research, Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Palliative Care and Paediatrics Unit, Population Policy and Practice Programme, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, London, UK

Professor Jonathan Ross Professor of Sexual Health and HIV, University Hospital Birmingham, UK

Professor Helen Snooks Professor of Health Services Research, Institute of Life Science, College of Medicine, Swansea University, UK

Please visit the website for a list of editors: www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/about/editors

Editorial contact: journals.library@nihr.ac.uk