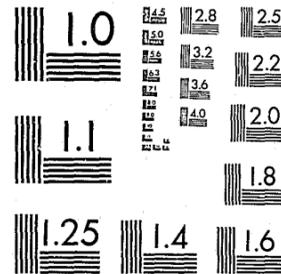


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Federal Probation

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Professionalism in Federal Probation: Illusion or Reality? 89263 MAY 8 1983 Robert L. Thomas

Implementation of a Probation Management Information System in a Local Office 89264 ACQUISITIONS William E. Hemple

Psychological Services: A Consumer Model for Probation Officers 89265 George A. Foelker, Jr.
Ron Bomer
Roderick L. Hall

The Ocean Tides Experiment: Treatment of Serious Juvenile Offenders in an Open Residential Setting 89266 Charles Lindner
Brother Robert Wagner

Juvenile Court: An Endangered Species 89267 Roger B. McNally

Female Professionals in Corrections: Equal Employment Opportunity Issues 89268 Lee W. Potts

Criminality and Psychopathology: Treatment for the Guilty 89269 John M. Bush

Idiomatopsychic Variables in the Behavioral Assessment of Offenders: In Need of Much More Attention Walter J. Moretz, Jr.

Correctional Practices in the Soviet Union 89270 James P. Rowoldt
Chris W. Eskridge

89263-89270

MARCH 1983

89265

Psychological Services: A Consumer Model for Probation Officers

BY GEORGE A. FOELKER, JR., RON BOMER,
AND RODERICK L. HALL*

WHEN probation officers are asked about psychological services in probation work, a wide variety of opinions are noted. The opinions are nearly unanimous on some points, and quite diverse on others. The consensus seems to be that psychological services are very difficult to obtain in some areas, are limited in availability in most areas, are expensive wherever they are found, and are of varying quality.

What has interested the authors most are the actions and inactions taken to make psychological services work for probation. Some of the positive actions include contracting for services to lower the cost-per-unit of service, taking advantage of state laws that mandate community mental health centers performing psychological services to certain clients in the criminal justice system, and trying different service providers to find the one(s) that best meet(s) the needs of the probation office. Some of the negative actions include open antagonism to psychological perspectives, restricting funding for psychological services, or utilizing untrained personnel to administer "unofficial" psychological evaluations. In viewing these various actions and reactions to the problems with psychological services, a remarkable phenomenon becomes apparent. Namely, that probation offices do not seem to use a unified plan or comprehensive model in their efforts.

It is the purpose of this article to present a consumer model for probation offices. The model is a comprehensive one based on consumerism because of the nature of probation office business. The probation office has a working capital (public funds) to render services (criminal justice). The business men and women, the probation officers, are expected to utilize any needed resources to accomplish their work. Therein lies the key to the model. For when probation officers utilize psychological services, the probation officers become consumers of those services. Consumerism, in turn, offers instructive ideas on how to make the most of the purchased service.

The thesis of this article is that probation officers can become more efficient and effective in utilizing

psychological services when they develop their role as consumers in this process. The consumer model approach presented here will necessitate looking first at the sources and products of psychological services, and the issues and problems associated with them. Then, the implications for the probation officer in the process of consuming psychological services will be addressed by identifying the consumer role and role behaviors of the probation officer needed to address the problems identified.

Sources and Products of Psychological Services

Psychological services are obtained from three sources: "inhouse," consultants, and outside agencies. The rarest source of the three, but potentially the most efficient and effective, is the "inhouse" psychologist. This individual will probably be a staff member of the probation office, or of the county or judicial district court. However, the psychologist may also be an employee of the community or state mental health/mental retardation system, who is assigned as a liaison agent in the juvenile/criminal justice system. The inhouse psychologist will most likely be a licensed psychologist who will perform a wide range of services, including diagnostic assessment, consultation, and testifying in court.

A second source is the consultant psychologist. This person, working individually or as a member of a group, will typically be a licensed psychologist. Not associated with any governmental agency, the consultant is used intermittently on a case-by-case basis, or is retained to provide on-going services as requested. The services of a consultant are obtained through contractual arrangement.

The third source of psychological services is an agency psychological service provider. The employing agencies may be private, nonprofit, or for-profit entities, or may be units of city, county, state, or Federal government. The agency will not likely be specializing in juvenile or criminal justice issues, but rather in other clientele characteristics, such as alcoholism, mental retardation, mental illness, etc. In contrast to the consultant psychologist, the agency typically provides services not arranged through contracting, but rather through the process of the agency determining the appropriateness of admitting and

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servicing the client. Fees are then assessed based on services rendered, and are usually adjusted according to a sliding fee scale. Additionally, unlike the in-house or consultant psychologist, the agency psychological service provider will most likely not be a licensed psychologist.

Regardless of the source of psychological services, or the professional qualifications of the service providers, or the nature of the psychological services themselves, the products are essentially the same. The product is a written report identifying a few key points about the services rendered. Typically, the report will address client background/demographic characteristics, reason(s) for referral, psychological techniques used, results and recommendations. Typically, too, the probation officer exerts control over the referral reason(s), but the psychological service provider exerts control over the quantity and quality of information in the psychological report.

Issues and Problems with Sources and Products of Psychological Services

There is a generic issue that forms a background to the elements of discussion in this section — the competence of the psychological service provider. Competence is used here in its general sense — the ability to meet the minimal requirements of a task. It is essential to realize that just because one utilizes the services of a licensed psychologist (or a license-exempt provider in an agency), that does *not* mean that the service deliverer will be competent in the particular services rendered. Licensure, or certification, does *not* equal competence.^{1,2,3} Thus, in the consumer model presented here, competency is not a given, nor does its determination lie solely in the domain of the psychology profession. Rather, the probation officer has a role in the determination of whether or not competent services are delivered. This is because typically the probation officer established the reason(s) for referral, and it is the reason for referral that specifies the general task for the psychological service provider. Therefore, the probation officer has a say in determining if the services provided met the minimal requirements of the task (the reason for referral). Beyond this background issue of competence are issues that arise from the particular setting in which a service provider operates.

Working in the probation office or court setting, the inhouse psychologist will more likely have his or her

system of operations tailored to the needs of the probation officer. However, such proximity of day-to-day business may not prevent problems with compatibility issues. The attitudes of the inhouse psychologist toward the probationer and the role of the probation officer may be at odds with those of the probation officers.

Consultant psychologists are more common than inhouse psychologists, but are unavailable in some areas and expensive wherever they are found. Most psychologists work for institutions and agencies, and tend to do so in urban areas.⁴ Thus, consulting psychologists in juvenile/criminal justice systems are relatively rare. This relative unavailability is a factor in two issues—the choice of consultants, and the expense of consultant services. It may be that a probation office could be using the services of a particular consultant because he or she is the only one available, not necessarily because of any endorsement of the quality of services. Regardless of the quality of consultant services, the fees are usually paid for by the client or by the probation office. Since many clients are involuntary requestors of services and/or from lower economic strata of our society, they typically do not utilize the services of consultant psychologists.

Agencies, as the third source of psychological services, have attributes that make them attractive, but nevertheless have their own brand of issues and problems. Agency psychological service providers are more plentiful than inhouse or consultant psychologists and are salaried workers whose services are less expensive. Indeed, many agencies use a sliding-fee scale for billing clients. However, some assess a minimal charge that is still too great for involuntary or indigent clients to pay.

Referrals from a probation officer to an agency often go through a bureaucratic maze, when compared with those to a consultant or inhouse psychologist. Besides problems with the sheer numbers of personnel, their attitudes can pose problems. Some employees may have uncooperative and/or adversarial attitudes towards working with a probation officer. These workers may have a mistaken notion that the probation officer represents the police, so that the worker may feel inclined to represent the client in some sort of adversarial role against the P.O. In short, the agency employees may act and react not to the client needs alone but to perceptions of who the probation officer is and what the probation officer is perceived to represent.

Besides issues and problems with the sources of psychological services, there are also concerns about the products themselves. Psychological reports are often criticized for restating the obvious, being

inconsistent with other psychological reports, having too much jargon, or lacking specific and usable recommendations. In summary, then, the probation officer often has negative regard for either making referrals for, or using, long-awaited, expensive psychological reports because of content reasons.

A Consumer Model Approach as an Aid to Resolving the Problems

The foregoing section presented some issues and problems with the sources and products of psychological services to sharply focus the reader's attention on the perplexities involved in psychological service delivery. Here, a consumer model for resolving the above-mentioned perplexities. Following the model, specific role behaviors will be identified for the probation officer utilizing psychological services.

A major assumption of the consumer model is that probation officers are a change agent for the individual and a control agent for society.^{5,6} Many of the tasks of the probation officer are those of a case manager. Case managing is used here in the sense that the probation officer must see to it that needed services from outside the probation office are secured to satisfy the requirements of a given case. In overview, then, the probation officer is a client/societal/legal agent who secures psychological services from service providers. A product representing the services (the psychological report) or the services themselves are exchanged for a fee. This process of securing producer services/products for non-producers for a fee is by definition a consumer process. Thus, the representative agent, the probation officer, is a consumer of psychological services/products.

It would seem at first blush that adding a consumer role is just adding more work, not solutions, to the life of a probation officer. However, it is the thesis of this paper that probation officers can become more efficient and effective in utilizing psychological services by developing their role as consumers in that process. The following section will identify the consumer role behaviors of the probation officer needed to approach the issues and minimize some of the problems identified.

Consumer Role Behaviors in Securing Psychological Services

This section will identify the major consumer role behaviors by describing each of five components of

the consumer model: identifying services providers; setting up relationships; making referrals; giving feedback and redressing grievances; and consumer activism. The following can only serve as a descriptive rather than definitive guide for a probation officer to utilize.

An essential ingredient to effective consumerism is being informed. This constitutes the first component of the consumer model. For the probation officer, this means identifying the potential psychological service providers. The determination of who are the potential psychological service providers can be accomplished by compiling a listing using the following means. First, the probation officers should pool together the names of all service providers they have used, are using, or have heard about. Second, the list should be supplemented with the names of *psychologists* in the yellow pages of the telephone directory. Third, the state licensing board can provide a registry of licensed and certified psychological personnel in the state, listed by business address. The board can also provide contact information about the state psychological association, and psychological associations in any given region of the state. These psychological associations will probably be able to assist in the compiling of names of psychological service providers. Indeed, they may have particular knowledge of those service providers with specialty in juvenile and/or criminal justice. Fourth, and finally, consider advertising in the local newspaper or the newsletters of the psychological associations. The four means identified should adequately provide the listing of potential providers needed to make the probation officer a more informed consumer.

The second component of the consumer model, setting up relationships with the service providers, can now proceed. The task is to convert the list of potential providers to a list of providers who will be used in probation office business. The first step in the process is for the probation office to determine categorical data about the clientele typically referred for psychological services. This accomplished, the next step is to succinctly identify the types of services needed, the level of specificity of recommendations, and the deadlines for service delivery. This step will be discussed more fully in the next component of the consumer model. The final step in the process, then, will be for someone in authority with knowledge of the case data to contact those potential providers listed.

The essential task of the negotiations is to determine if a potential service provider will provide needed services to any of the clientele the probation office has or expects to have. Several issues need to be attended to during the negotiations to accomplish this task.

¹ S. J. Gross, "The Myth of Professional Licensing," *American Psychologist*, 1978, 33, 1009-1016.

² H. F. Hess, "Entry Requirements for Professional Practice of Psychology," 32, 365-368.

³ J. D. Matarazzo, "Higher Education, Professional Accreditation, and Licensure," *American Psychologist*, 1977, 32, 856-859.

⁴ J. M. Richards, Jr., and C. D. Gottfredson, "Geographic Distribution of U.S. Psychologists," *American Psychologist*, 1978, 33, 1-9.

⁵ S. G. Dietrich, "The Probation Officer as Therapist," *Federal Probation*, Vol. 43, 1979.

⁶ F. Hussey, and D. E. Duffee, *Probation, Parole, and Community Field Services: Policy, Structure and Process*. New York: Harper & Row, 1980.

First, which types of clients does the potential provider believe he/she can serve, and how many of them per given unit of time? Second, for the clients identified and the projected types of services they need, what kind of non-psychological data will the provider need? For example, will a case history, or medical report be needed? These adjunct service reports may be already available to the probation officer, or might be obtained by the probation office cheaper and/or faster than procured by the psychological service provider. The third issue to attend to is how the probation officer will make a referral. That is, what referral form will be used, what kind and specificity of information will be on the form, from whom and to whom will the form be sent? If the service provider works for an agency, does the agency have a case manager, client advocate or program coordinator that provides oversight, advocacy and/or liaison functions? If so, how does the probation officer best utilize that person's services? The fourth and last issue to attend to during negotiations is developing a formal, written agreement between the probation office and the service provider. If the provider is a consultant, the agreement will be the work contract. With an agency, the agreement will be a written agreement about the interrelationships of the agency with the probation office. Both types of agreements should state the decisions reached during negotiations. This must include the specific, concrete steps (a flowchart) to refer and process a client. It is also important to specify the expected time frames for the referral services.

It was mentioned earlier that the probation officer has a clear role as a responsible consumer. The word "responsible" refers not only to fiscal duties, but also to other duties of a consumer. For the probation officer, the duties include complying with the agreements reached. Such compliance is most important during this third component of the consumer model, making referrals. "Making a referral" is *not* making a phone call or the filling out of a referral form and the sending of it to a service provider. Rather, a referral is the *process* of obtaining client services that one cannot provide alone. This process necessitates clearly informing a service provider of the specific type(s) of services needed. The reason(s) for the referral determine(s) the nature of the services provided. This in turn is dependent upon the quality of the information included in the referral. Thus, the probation officer has an important role in obtaining quality services. The services rendered can be no better than the clarity of the probation officer's communication, or the intuitive skills of the service provider. Specifically, then, the probation officer must clearly identify

three things in the referral: *why the client is being referred, what services are needed, and by when are the services needed.*

If an office procedure, statute, or court order is the reason for referral, the probation officer should state that information in writing in the referral. Closely tied to this process of clearly stating the reason for referral is the probation officer's expectation of what services are needed to satisfy the referral. If the reason for referral includes the nature of services needed, then those services can be clearly identified in the referral. For example, if a judge orders a client "to receive intensive psychotherapy to correct the pattern of sexually inappropriate behavior he is committing," then both the reason for referral (a court order) and the services needed ("intensive psychotherapy...") are specified by communicating in the referral form the judge's orders. Other situations may occur, however, in which no clear designation of all services expected are specified in the referral.

The third and final thing for the probation officer to identify in the referral is the time frame for the services needed. It is imperative to inform the service provider at the time of referral of the time constraints of the case. Such information will help the service provider determine at the onset if he or she should handle the referral. That early determination can save valuable time. If time constraints preclude a full, written report, one could request a brief report be made by one date, and a full report by a later date. In summary, clear communication in the referral component of the model is essential for the probation officer to be a responsible consumer. The rule of thumb is to share as much pertinent information as one can with the service provider in order to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the referral.

Giving feedback and redressing grievances about psychological services is the fourth component of the consumer model. The probation officer's representative agent and consumer roles make him or her part of a larger system. One essential aspect of any system is the feedback (regulatory) process needed to keep the system operative. In the consumer model presented here, the probation officers should utilize the regulatory (feedback) processes inherent in their role as consumers. Feedback can be positive and/or negative. Positive feedback would include expressions of satisfaction or appreciation about services rendered. Feedback of this type is important for an efficient system. Negative feedback to induce change in the system would include information about perceived problems with the service provider meeting obligations under agreements. This can be construed to include an informational complaint procedure. The

attitude of the probation officer giving negative feedback is important. The attitude should be one of fact-finding, not a caustic or judgmental one like belligerence, disgust, or rage. The initial inquiry into service problems may be all that is required. It could very well be, though, that the informal complaint procedure ends up being a formal grievance.

Grievances are a mixture of opinion and fact. If a probation officer disputes the quality or quantity of provision of services by a psychological service provider, there is a process to follow. The first stage is an informal one wherein the probation officer clearly communicates directly to the service provider the perceived problems. The probation officer must then carefully listen to the explanation provided. If dissatisfaction remains after the explanation, one may consider appealing to the service provider's supervisor, if he or she has one. Depending upon the probation office procedure, the probation officer may or may not need his or her own supervisor involved. If one is still unsatisfied at this stage, and wishes to continue the grievance, a formal complaint with the state licensing board can be filed. This is possible, though, only if your state still has a licensing board, and the psychological service provider is either certified or licensed by them. Such certification and licensing procedures typically include the requirement that the service provider uphold the ethics and standards of the American Psychological Association.^{7,8,9}

The fifth and final component of the consumer model involves consumer activism. Consumer activism is conceptualized here as the active process by consumers to become more effective in the systems that influence them. For probation officers as consumers, this means recognition and regard as a spe-

cial class of consumers with specialized needs. They can lobby and petition the powers that be for change. Such an initiative will require collective action and documentation. With organization and documentation, a plan can be formulated to make changes. For example, if the analyses of patterns of psychological service providers and their services reveal too few providers, too high fees, and/or too long turnaround times for reports, then a lobbying effort can be made. A case may be made for the probation office improving fiscal and case efficiency and effectiveness by hiring an in-house psychological service provider. It is also conceivable that changes could be made through the larger universities in the state. Those universities with graduate programs in psychology may be interested in using the probation office as a practicum or training location. If so, they could place advanced graduate psychology students under supervision in your office. They then could help provide some of the psychological services needed. The basic point, then, is to organize the probation officers as a consumer group and utilize their collective abilities to intervene in the systems that affect their services.

Summary

This article has addressed issues, problems, and concepts in the probation officer's utilization of psychological services. A demonstration was made of the consumer role of the probation officer in psychological service utilization. The thesis was presented that probation officers can become more efficient and effective by developing their role as consumers. A five-component consumer model was presented to indicate the role and role behaviors needed to address the issues and help resolve the problems with utilizing psychological services. It is the earnest hope of the authors to generate fruitful discussion about the methods needed to improve procurement and delivery of psychological services. The consumer model presented here is our contribution.

⁷ American Psychological Association: Standards for Educational and Psychological Tests. Washington, D.C.: Author, 1977.
⁸ American Psychological Association: Ethical Principles of Psychologists (1981 revision). Washington, D.C.: Author, 1981.
⁹ American Psychological Association: Who is the Client? The Ethics of Psychological Intervention in the Criminal Justice System. Washington, D.C.: Edited by John Monahan, 1980.

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