

Training matters

The purchaser-provider game: a user-friendly management workshop

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Following the recent reorganisation of the health service, doctors have been advised to accept the challenge of involving themselves in general management, (Ross, 1991), and the need for additional training in management skills has been recognised (Higgins, 1989; CTC Working Party Report, 1990). Local trainers, however, often do not know what sort of management training is appropriate, nor how or when it should be introduced into an eight year specialist training agenda, and the current situation for many trainees may, therefore, be described as hit or miss (Lock, 1991). Trainees need also to learn to consider not only their immediate clinical responsibility to individual patients, but also the broader concepts of preventive and public health medicine and the principles of equity, efficiency, quality and efficacy which underly the purchaser-provider contractual process.

This paper describes an educational and very well received extended role play workshop which was recently held in the North West, the aim of which was to give psychiatric trainees the opportunity to come to grips with a few of the major issues presently confronting providers and purchasers. The workshop is relatively straightforward, and would be easy to reproduce on a local level.

The workshop

Preparation

The ideal venue should have a number of rooms suitable for one large and multiple small groups. On arrival at the meeting participants are issued with an information pack (a copy of which is obtainable from the authors), and are randomly allocated to groups. Each group should consist of 10 to 12 people; within each group participants are subdivided into 'purchasers' (n = 3 or 4) and 'providers' (n = 7 or 8). Each 'provider' subgroup and the combined 'purchaser'

group requires a facilitator with experience in role play exercises.

The suggested timetable (minimum guidelines) allows 5 minutes for an introduction, 20 minutes for each of two theoretical talks, and 20 minutes for the explanation of the workshop. Thereafter, 45 minutes are allowed for the first small group workshop, and 30 minutes each for the second small group workshop and concluding large group feedback session.

Theoretical background

All participants initially meet together for talks which cover the theory of the current NHS reforms from the point of view of purchasers and providers. We suggest that two speakers – a successful consultant (provider) manager and a sympathetic and educationally minded District Health Authority (purchaser) manager – be invited from different health districts. Additionally, a third speaker should relate, in practical terms, the theoretical talks to the imaginary setting of the role play exercises, and explain the aims and tasks of the workshop groups:

The year is 1993. Participants are all working in the 'Kidneyland Health District'. 'Providers' are senior mental health professionals, based at Kidneypool DGH, who provide general psychiatric care to the district population. 'Purchasers' are the executive and non-executive members of the 'Kidneyland Purchasing Consortium'. At present there is no subspecialty service for mentally handicapped adults who suffer from psychiatric illness. Such patients have traditionally been admitted to general adult beds in the DGH under the care of staff with minimal training in mental handicap.

The 'Kidneyland Purchasing Consortium' has recently allocated the sum of £250 000 for the development and running of this necessary subspecialty service, which will be additional to the funding allocated to the general psychiatric service. The purpose of the workshop is to assemble a watertight bid (encompassing a mission statement and business plan) for this funding. It may be assumed that 90% of the additional funding may be used for salaries for there

is a 12 roomed house within the DGH site which could be used as a base.

The 'Grimmsville University Trust Hospital' in a neighbouring Health District offers a regional child and adolescent psychiatric service which also caters for children with mental handicap. The 'Grimmsville Trust' is in serious financial difficulty and Professors Freakout (Mental Handicap), Dubious (Child and Adolescent Psychiatry) and Boring (Psychology) have put together a very attractive bid for the above funding. Additionally, there are a number of charitable organisations which have been lobbying the DHA, and a number of interested private-for-profit competitors.

Small group workshop I

'Providers' divide into subgroups to assemble a bid, helped by facilitators. Each 'provider' subgroup elects a spokesperson (their 'clinical director') who will later present that bid to the 'purchaser' members of the respective group. All the 'purchasers', meanwhile, meet together with a facilitator (ideally a real life NHS purchaser manager) to determine the priority issues which they would want the 'providers' bid to address.

Small group workshop II

The combined 'purchaser' group now splits up, and the 'purchaser' and 'provider' members of the small groups meet. 'Provider' spokespersons present the bid to the three or four 'purchasers' across a 'boardroom table' observed by the other group members, who report on their observations in the concluding feedback-discussion session.

Comment

The workshop was attended by an equal ratio of senior and junior trainees who reported that the proceedings were enjoyable and highly educational.

Many had not previously contemplated the complexities of service delivery, and the wider aspects of the health needs of communities. The subspecialty of mental handicap was chosen for the exercise because few people knew anything about it, which facilitated the adherence to principle rather than detail. Even so, because of time constraints, group facilitators needed to be quite directive to prevent the groups from getting bogged down in minor detail. Most trainees reported that they had felt pressured, but produced some quite comprehensive bids nevertheless.

The workshop could possibly be improved by extending the time allocated to the small group workshops and by allowing more time for discussion; furthermore, by enabling each trainee to participate in, alternately, a 'purchaser' and a 'provider' group.

Acknowledgement

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References

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