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EFFECTIVENESS
OF THE
MINNESOTA
ALCOHOL SAFETY PROGRAM

The Major Findings and Recommendations

prepared by

Department of Public Safety

State Planning Agency

1990

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In 1987, the Minnesota Legislature mandated that the Department of Public Safety, together with the Department of Human Services and the State Planning Agency, prepare a report evaluating the implementation and effects of the Alcohol Safety Programs required in Minnesota Statutes 169.124 to 169.126. The purpose of these programs is to identify the severity of the driver's chemical abuse problem, and to recommend the appropriate level of education or treatment needed to resolve the problem and prevent subsequent offenses.

The objective of the changes enacted by the 1987 legislature (Chapter 315) was to improve the accuracy of chemical use problem assessments by reimbursing the county at a higher rate for the longer time it would take to do a better assessment.

In response to the legislative mandate, the Department of Public Safety created the Alcohol Problem Assessment (APA) Task Force to study the issues. It consists of professionals from state and county agencies and private organizations concerned with the DWI problem.

The Task Force conducted a survey of certified alcohol use assessors and screeners. In that survey, 62% responded that the program has been working "all right" since the legislative changes of 1987 were made effective.

While 77% of the respondents felt that their agency's ability to identify alcohol problems has only "increased somewhat" due to the law change, 12% feel that the law change has actually made it more difficult to identify these problems.

Furthermore, 57% responded that their agency's ability to obtain appropriate rehabilitation treatment has only "increased somewhat", and 29% feel that the law change has created more problems in getting the proper level of care for their clients.

THE PROBLEM:

Many respondents felt that it takes just as long to assess a "no problem" drinker as a problem drinker, so the state should not differentiate between them when reimbursing the counties. In some counties, the client must undergo two separate interviews, sometimes repeating the screening process before an assessment can be completed. Also, the differences between a screening and an assessment is not clear in many jurisdictions.

RECOMMENDATION: Combine the screening and assessment procedures into a single interview. This would result in better information for education and rehabilitation referrals, less duplication of efforts, and a more streamlined reimbursement process. Counties could be reimbursed on a per case basis.

ACTION: Legislative changes to Minnesota Statutes, Sections 169.124 and 169.126 would be required. Language has been drafted to be considered by the 1990 Legislature.

THE PROBLEM:

The Driver and Vehicle Services Division found that reports of screenings and assessments are often inconsistent and incomplete. The Task Force felt that if the assessors understood the full usage of these reports, they would be more complete and accurate.

RECOMMENDATION: Revise the form used for reporting the results of screenings and assessments completed. Review the information currently collected for the Alcohol Safety Program. Coordinate this information for both Rule 25 and Chapter 315 requirements.

ACTION: A subcommittee of the Task Force is currently proceeding with this recommendation. Their report is due July 1, 1990.

THE PROBLEM:

The Task Force recognized the fact that DWI arrests are continuing on a downward trend after a high in 1986. (See TRENDS later in this summary.) It appears that while recent awareness efforts have altered the behavior of many social drinkers, we have yet to reach the problem drinker.

RECOMMENDATION: Determine the recidivism rate for chemically impaired driving offenders, using the database from the Driver and Vehicle Services Division. This could provide information regarding the target audience of educational and behavioral programs.

ACTION: The Department of Public Safety has begun the research for this study. A preliminary report is expected in early 1990.

THE PROBLEM:

Under Rule 25, there is no provision for treatment other than traditional in- or out- patient chemical dependency treatment. Alternatives to such treatments have been effective for chemically abusing drivers in the past, but are no longer available within the guidelines of this system. 24% of the survey respondents indicated that offenders are "almost always" or "often" denied needed treatment because they do not qualify under Rule 25.

One of the problems with jail as an alternative to treatment, according to Judge Bernard E. Boland, is that almost 100% of the people jailed or imprisoned eventually get out -- still untreated and even more antisocial. Yet 71% of the respondents to the survey stated that a jail sentence is the most frequent sentencing recommendation for offenders who are found in assessment to be not amenable to treatment.

RECOMMENDATION: Study the "at risk" abuser, and the repeat offender programs and services available, particularly in the greater Minnesota area. Also re-think prevention efforts in terms of more successful methods of treatment, and explore alternatives to traditional in- and out- patient treatment qualifying under Rule 25.

ACTION: A subcommittee of the Task Force is currently studying this recommendation. Their report is due October 1, 1990.

THE PROBLEM:

A major problem identified by the Task Force is that Section 9 of Chapter 315 requires that assessments done for driver licensing decisions be consistent with Rule 25 criteria. However, Rule 25 was not drafted with driver licensing decisions in mind.

RECOMMENDATION: Re-examine Rule 25, and coordinate with Chapter 315 and the Department of Public Safety's rules regarding the individual's ability to re-obtain a driver license.

ACTION: The Department of Human Services has agreed to begin the rule process in January 1991. During this process, the Task Force will assist in improving the compatibility of the rule with Chapter 315 and driver license rules.

THE PROBLEM:

67% of the respondents to the survey stated that they "seldom" or "never" notify the Department of Public Safety when a DWI offenders are convicted of violating the treatment/education requirements of their probation.

RECOMMENDATION: Clarify the need for the Department of Public Safety to be notified of the probation violations of multiple offenders.

ACTION: Language has been drafted to amend Minnesota Statutes, Section 171.16, allowing the courts to recommend suspension of driving privileges of those persons who do not comply with the requirements of a chemical use assessment. This will be introduced in the 1991 session.

THE PROBLEM:

The Task Force's perceived that there is clearly a lack of understanding in several areas of the process of assessing the chemically impaired driver. This was supported by many of the comments in the survey,

RECOMMENDATION: Develop a procedure manual and provide additional training. Document the program procedures and polices. Address the issues and questions mentioned in the survey and the Task Force meetings. For example:

- The \$75 program fee

- Rule 25 criteria for treatment:

 - policies for abstinence

 - budget considerations

- How to obtain and read a traffic record

- What elements are required in an assessment

- County reciprocity procedures

- Qualification and certification of assessors

- Driver License revocation and reinstatement procedures

- Reimbursement criteria & requirements

ACTION: A subcommittee of the Task Force is currently studying this recommendation.

There were several other ideas which developed during the Task Force meetings. These are long-term considerations, and as such, no action plan has been developed at this time. These ideas include:

Encourage adoption of screening and assessment tools specifically designed for juveniles.

Examine the feasibility of requiring all counties to use a computerized case management and classification system.

Examine the computerized Minnesota Assessment of Chemical Health (MACH) system for conducting assessments. Is it feasible and realistic to extend to all counties for assessments?

Examine the feasibility of automating the reporting of all screenings and assessments, through the Trial Court Information System (TCIS).

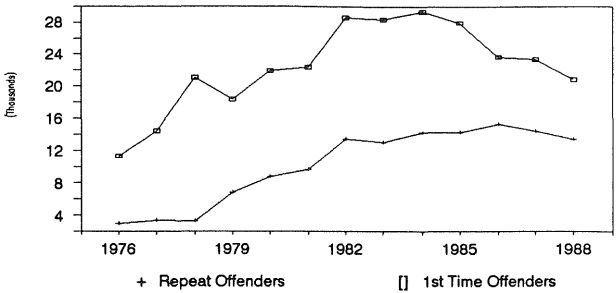
Explore whether health insurance providers are authorizing treatment at the appropriate levels. Review the standards which health providers use for treatment, compared to Chapter 315 and Rule 25 criteria.

Evaluate the assessment reports filed on repeat offenders to look for discrepancies and inconsistencies. (Over half of the respondents to the survey admitted that they at least sometimes use assessments from private agencies that do not meet Chapter 315 requirements.)

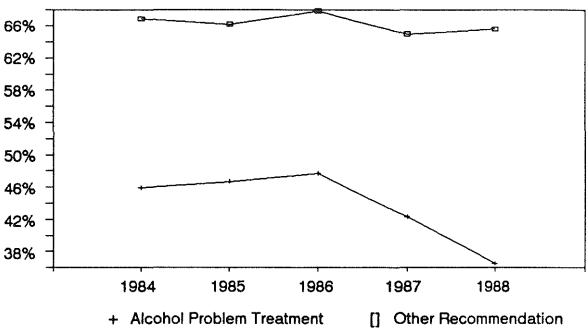
Examine the validity of the 30-day abstinence period and its use in the screening and assessment process. (According to the survey, many respondents felt that it is relatively easy for a client to abstain for 30 days, which changes the level of treatment available under Rule 25.)

TRENDS

According to statistics gathered by the Department of Public Safety, some important trends seem to be developing. The first graph shows that the number of first and repeat DWI offenders has been decreasing. However, it is not clear whether this is due to fewer impaired drivers or a decrease in arrest activities.



The second graph shows the declining percentage of defendants being recommended for alcohol problem treatment.



A final trend worth considering is the demographics of the impaired driver. Increasingly over the past several years, this driver has been male. Consistently, he has been primarily between the ages of 21 and 25, with the second largest group being aged 26-30. These two groups account for nearly half of the impaired driving population. This is important to note, since this age group will increase over the next ten years, which could increase the DWI problem.

SUPPORT DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MINNESOTA ALCOHOL SAFETY PROGRAM

prepared by
Department of Public Safety
State Planning Agency
Department of Human Services
(1989)

Contains the history of DWI prevention and rehabilitation efforts in Minnesota; an overview of the criminal and administrative sanctions for DWI offenses; a description of DWI trends and legislative changes; and a synopsis of the Alcohol Safety Program with recommendations for improvement.

THE MINNESOTA ALCOHOL SAFETY PROGRAM: A Survey of Screeners and Assessors

prepared by
State Planning Agency
(1989)

Results of the survey of alcohol safety program screeners and assessors conducted in the fall of 1988, including respondents' comments regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the programs, and their suggestions for improvement.

To obtain copies of these reports

Send your written request to:

Driver and Vehicle Services
Attn: David Anderson
208 Transportation Building
St. Paul, MN 55155