

Why I Love Forensic Mental Health and the People Who Work There

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What's Different about Us

- We don't just say stuff
- We are much more likely to rely on evidence
- Lawyers don't scare us
- We take responsibility for what we say
- We never, ever give up on anybody

Why Our Work Matters

- Good evaluations contribute to public safety
- Good evaluations save money
- Defendants have a right to good evaluations
- The public has a right to good evaluations

What it Costs

- Secondary trauma is very real
- Tragedy can wear us down
- We feel more responsibility than control
- “Momma, tell that mean man to stop yelling at me!” – Cross-examination 101

Evaluation of Competency to Stand Trial

- Why competency is the worst right ever
- A proposal to drastically revise US competency laws
- All or nothing answers to complicated questions are seldom helpful
- What we ought to be telling the courts:
 - How to help the person receive a fair and speedy trial

Evaluation of Mental Status at the Time of the Offense

- Mind reading is really hard in the moment
- It's even harder in the past
- The real question (from Joel's mom):
 - “What the hell were you thinking?”
- The three magic words
- The importance of multiple collateral sources of information

Assessing Risk

- The great debate: Actuarial vs. Clinical
- Advantages and disadvantages of actuarial tools
- Advantages and disadvantages of SPJ's
- Worst name ever: Anamnestic Assessment
- One useful way to use actuarial tools
- Resolving the great debate:
 - Dvoskin and Heilbrun (2001)

Why Are They at Risk?

- All behavior is an interaction between a person and a situation
- Look at their history of bad things
- What was happening within and outside of the person when each bad thing happened?
- Identify risk-laden situations
- What is it about them... Skill deficits

Some Troubling Questions about Sex Offender Risk Assessment

- What percentage of sex offenses result in arrest, much less conviction?
- If you don't know the numerator or the denominator, how can you know the fraction?
- This doesn't mean we can't assess risk...
- ... but it does mean more precise language.

Some Questions about the Use of Psychological Tests in Forensic MH

- “This person may be depressed” ??? Seriously?
- Doesn't that mean he may NOT be depressed
- How do you know the relative likelihood of each?
- If these are empirical, what study are you relying on?
- Do you know the characteristics of the normative group? Error rates?

Forensic Treatment

- Good risk assessments should be useful in providing treatment...
- ...but often they are not.
- Treatment plans should rely on risk assessments...
- ...but they usually don't.
- Busting the myth.....

Busting the Myth

- Better treatment gives you better outcomes...
- ... for mental health.
- However, if you want to reduce crime...
- ... you have to attend to criminogenic variables.
- Put `em in your reports

The Importance of Trauma

- If you want to understand me as a perpetrator of violence...
- ...you must first understand me as a victim.
- Pathology freaks and the *Book of Insults*
- How not to get a date
- Stop telling people what is wrong with them.

Two Relatively Useless Concepts in Risk Assessment and Treatment

- Insight
 - How come they have to have it and we don't?
- Manipulativeness
 - Or, as we call it when we do it, social skills
- Compliance
 - Or, as we call it, motivation

Suicide and Interpersonal Violence

- Suicidality implies the absence of protective factors – nothing to lose
- Suicide risk is often acute and impulsive
- Suicidality raises the risk of violence, because the person will literally have “nothing to lose.”

Recovery and Forensic MH

- What the recovery model is:
 - Hopeful
 - Strength-based
 - Respectful
- What the recovery model is not
 - A gift certificate
 - Promise of a world without consequences
- It's all about skills

Preventing Tragedies

- Applying relapse prevention to SMI
- What knocks people off the wagon

The Causes of Violence

- Brief Survey
- Identify our enemies
 - Anger
 - Fear
 - Despair

How to Change Human Behavior for the Better

- Listen to your grandmother
- Punishment is pretty stupid
- The most powerful behavior change agent is absolutely free
- If fear and anger cause violence...
 - ...Then what are the predictable effects of threats by staff?

The Key to Successful Treatment

- Our enemy is despair
- The only cure for despair is hope
- Forensic evaluations can instill hope
- Forensic treatment can instill hope
- Even sex offender treatment can instill hope
- Of all the gifts you ever give to your patients...

The Enemy and the Cure

- Hopeless people scare me
- Hope is the only reason anybody acts right
- Hope is the only reason anybody does anything
- Our enemy is despair
- The only cure for despair is hope
- The greatest gift you will ever give to your patients (and your colleagues) is hope

Thank You!

- Thank you for inviting me
- Thank you for your time
- Thank you for the work you do
- Thank you for trying to make America safer