



Consumer Rated Mental Health Outcome Measure Glen Tobias

In line with Neami's program of quality improvement it has been decided to encourage and invite all consumers to complete the Basis 32 self rated measure of mental health status. Basis 32 is one of the measures Neami uses to assist consumers to measure their own mental health status.

Basis 32 was selected after a thorough investigation of the outcome measures available. The criteria established for selection was that the outcome measure:

- Had consumers of mental health services involved in its development.
- Was easy and brief to complete.
- Was a valid and tested measurement tool.
- Was completed by the consumer, not the staff member.

Basis 32 is made up of a 32 questionnaire survey designed to assess the consumer's own perception of his/her mental health. The consumer answers the questions by reporting the degree of difficulty with functioning or symptoms that result in the need for psychiatric treatment. The value of the consumer's perspective in evaluating the outcome of service is widely accepted. Many studies report that consumers provide reliable and valid assessments of their mental health status.

Consumers and staff raised a number of issues with reference to the negative tone of the questionnaire. Neami recognised these issues as valid and has contacted McLean Hospital of Harvard Medical School with reference to the development of a 'strengths' based questionnaire. The staff who developed Basis 32 are in the very early stages of developing a strengths based outcome measure. Neami has indicated its interest in such a project and has also contacted Dermot Casey of the Australian Commonwealth Department of Health regarding our interest in such a project.

Consumers at Neami are invited to complete Basis 32 soon after they have become engaged with the service. They are also invited to complete Basis 32 yearly and upon exit from the service. By comparing the responses it is possible to determine whether the consumer feels his or her condition has improved and in what particular areas of functioning.

At Neami we will be particularly interested in the Basis 32 scales of "relation to self and others" and daily living skills. These are areas in which much of our rehabilitation work is done. We also have regard for the fact that Neami is not the only agency that may be providing support and care to the consumer. In addition Neami anticipates using the results of Basis 32 for other purposes such as outcomes profiles for different groups of consumers by age, gender, living situation, having or not having caregivers, etc. Detecting trends in outcomes .better....worse. for these groups will be vital in assisting Neami to improve its services to consumers.

Needs Assessment

A consistent theme which has emerged from mental health services over the last ten years is the recognition of the importance of a needs based approach towards the support of those with a disability resulting from mental illness. Even though both community rehabilitation and clinical sectors confirm this, there is little agreement about how these needs should be defined and assessed.

Reviewing the process of identifying needs with consumers has assisted Neami to take a new and more progressive direction. Building upon Neami's continuous improvement program Neami has researched the mental health needs assessment tools available for use with people who have experienced mental illness. Neami set criteria for the selection of the needs assessment tool. Neami searched for an assessment measure that was easily learned, brief to administer by staff, understood by consumers, valid, reliable, both qualitative and quantitative in nature and able to accommodate both consumer and staff ratings.

Neami specifically chose the Camberwell Assessment of Need as it most closely fits the criteria. It also allows both consumer and staff to rate the level of need in areas of life, based on their perception. Slade discussed this issue of perception in 1994. There is a difference in perception between users of mental health services and health professionals. He has argued that once the differences are identified, then dialogue and negotiation between user and staff can take place to agree on the needs and the individual service plan that will assist the user to meet their needs.

The CAN is made up of a series of questions about the level of assistance required and received in 22 domains of health and social needs. Neami consumers and staff will complete the CANSAS every 6 months and this forms the consumer's Individual Service Plan.