

**PREPARING PROFESSIONAL
COUNSELORS TO CONDUCT
SITE-BASED OUTCOMES
RESEARCH TO SUPPORT THEIR
CLINICAL SERVICES**

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Professional counselors have a professional
and an ethical obligation to measure the
effectiveness of the clinical services they
provide.

ACA Code of Ethics

- ❑ A1c - viable and effective treatment plans
- ❑ C2a - practice within boundaries of competence
- ❑ C2d - monitor effectiveness
- ❑ C2f - awareness of scientific and professional information
- ❑ C6e - use approaches that are grounded in theory and/or have an empirical or scientific foundation

How do counselors know that their counseling is effective?

Evidence-Based Therapy

- ❑ Intuition and Clinical Impressions (How do I think this client progressed in counseling?)
- ❑ Client Satisfaction Surveys (How did the client think they progressed in counseling?)
- ❑ Programmed Programs (increase in knowledge and awareness)
- ❑ Global Indicators (was the right therapy used for a client with a particular problem)
- ❑ Best Practices (Did I do what the "experts" said I should do?)
- ❑ Formal Outcomes Research

Limitations

- ❑ Researcher bias (validity of clinical opinion)
- ❑ Client bias and motivation
- ❑ Knowledge gain does not equate to behavior change
- ❑ Sampling error or size of sample
- ❑ Instrumentation

What do professional counselors need to know to be able to engage in meaningful site-based outcomes research to measure effectiveness?

Important Considerations

- ❑ It is hard to develop truly experimental research designs in the behavioral sciences
- ❑ Individual counseling sites are sufficiently different so comparisons between programs may not be appropriate
- ❑ Not all changes observed can be necessarily attributed to counseling
- ❑ Effect size may be more useful than significant difference
- ❑ Minimize limitations as much as possible

Fundamental Principles

- ❑ Research Design
 - Repeated Measures
 - Longitudinal/cross-sectional
 - Data collection procedures
- ❑ Sampling
- ❑ Instrumentation
 - Validity
 - Reliability
 - Stability

General Statistical Principles

- ▣ Descriptive Statistics
- ▣ Parametric versus Non-parametric data
- ▣ Mean/Standard Deviation
- ▣ Correlation and significance
- ▣ t-tests, significance levels
- ▣ ANOVA, ANCOVA
- ▣ Regression
- ▣ Effect size

Applied Knowledge

- ▣ The importance of systematic data collection
- ▣ Which statistical procedures to use and when to use them?
- ▣ Instrument selection (Validity, reliability, stability of scores)
- ▣ Statistical Difference and Effect Size
- ▣ Interpretation of the results (What do the numbers really mean?)
- ▣ Importance of limitations
- ▣ Integration of quantitative and qualitative data

Establishing a Formal Outcomes Research Agenda

- ▣ Determine variables to be examined (Must represent the core of the services offered)
 - Delphi study
 - ▣ Philosophy of organization
 - ▣ Intake data already collected
 - ▣ Interviews with clinicians
 - ▣ Examination of treatment plans
 - ▣ Instrumentation
 - ▣ Requirements from regulatory bodies
- ▣ Determine which variables are to be examined
- ▣ Establish threshold levels of acceptability

Research Agenda (cont)

- ❑ Develop research design based on the variables to be examined
- ❑ Establish an integrated data collection process
- ❑ Conduct staff training
- ❑ Establish Inter-rater reliability for any qualitative data that will be used
- ❑ Collect data according to the research design

Research Agenda (cont)

- ❑ Analyze results
- ❑ Compare results to predetermined criterion levels of acceptability
- ❑ Make adjustments to the program based on the results (if necessary)
- ❑ Start over
 - Continue with same variables
 - Adjust criterion levels
 - Select additional variables from Delphi Study

Benefits of Establishing and Maintaining a Research Agenda

- ❑ Foundation for quality services
 - Responsibly answers the question "How do you know that what you do works?"
- ❑ Marketing
 - Based on Professional and Ethical principles
 - Follows established behavioral research guidelines
 - Focus on research process rather than results
 - Transparency
- ❑ Funding and Grants

Recommendations

- ❑ Sufficient coursework in research design and statistics at the Master's level
- ❑ Knowledge and application of statistical applications
- ❑ Teach students to become critical consumers of outcomes research efforts found in the literature
- ❑ Promote a college/community connection to help treatment programs engage in outcomes research using the research expertise of faculty
- ❑ Publish viable research strategies for others to explore
- ❑ Advocate for greater accountability

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