



What is a “System of Care?”

A system of care is a comprehensive spectrum of mental health and other necessary services which are organized into a coordinated network to meet the multiple and changing needs of children and adolescents with severe emotional disturbances and their families.



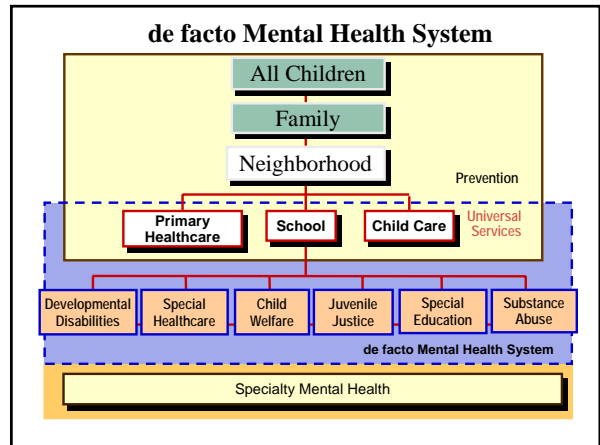
Key Principles/Values of a System of Care

- Based on needs of child and family
- Promotes partnerships between families and professionals
- Involves collaboration between multiple agencies and service sectors
- Involves provision of individualized supports and services based on strengths and needs in multiple domains
- Promotes culturally responsive supports and services
- Includes system of ongoing evaluation and accountability



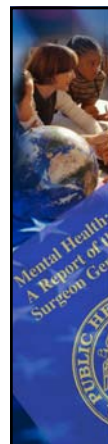
Characteristics of Children with Serious Emotional Disturbances

- Frequently served in multiple systems
- Variety of diagnoses but most common are ADHD, Oppositional Disorder, and Conduct Disorder
- High rate of co-occurring disorders
- Deficits in intellectual and educational functioning
- Deficits in social and adaptive behavior
- Frequently from low income families
- Have often been exposed to violence, and to losses of major people in their life



Systems of Care as Changing, Evolving Entities

- From primarily outpatient and inpatient/residential services to expanded continuum of services;
- From almost exclusively funding programs of services to creating flexible funds to support individualized care;
- From small percentage of funds being kept flexible to creation of care management entities with expanded flexible funds to purchase individualized services.



Systems of care of 2000 are often dramatically different than systems of care of 10 years ago, creating the need for more research, evaluation, and dissemination.



Program designers “never expect to arrive at a steady state of programming because they’re constantly tinkering as participants, conditions, learnings, and context change. They don’t aspire to arrive at a model subject to summative evaluation and generalization. Rather, they aspire to continuous progress, ongoing adaptation, and rapid responsiveness...”

[Patton, 1994, p. 313](#)



What does evidence say about Systems of Care?

“Collectively, the results of the evaluations of systems of care suggest that they are effective in achieving important system improvements, such as reducing use of residential placements, and out-of-state placements, and in achieving improvements in functional behavior...”

[Surgeon General’s Report](#)



...There are also indications that parents are more satisfied in systems of care than in more traditional service delivery systems...

[Surgeon General’s Report](#)



...The effect of systems of care on cost is not yet clear, however. Nor has it yet been demonstrated that services delivered within a system of care will result in better clinical outcomes ...There is clearly a need for more attention to be paid to the relationship between changes at the system level and changes at the practice level .”

[Surgeon General’s Report on Mental Health, 1999, p. 193](#)



Important National Evaluation

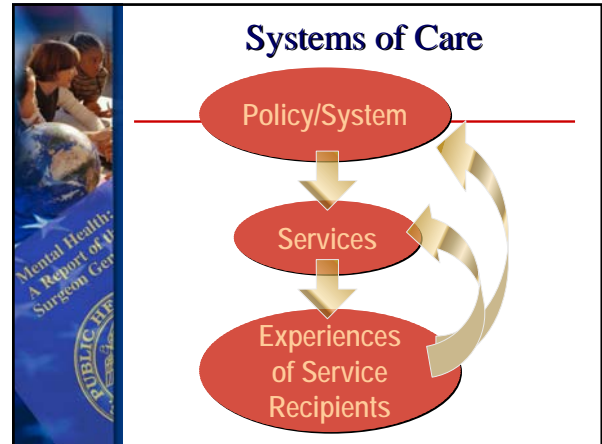
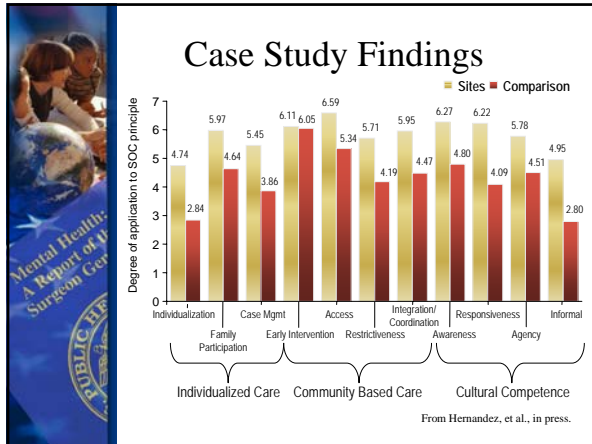
Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services Program for Children and Their Families

- Ongoing evaluation being conducted by ORC/Macro.
- Data to soon be available on comparison study.



Theory of Change

The underlying assumptions that guide a service delivery strategy and are believed to be critical to achieving desired goals.



“We should recognize the importance of research and evaluation “that trace backward from the experiences, behavior, perceptions, and status of service recipients”

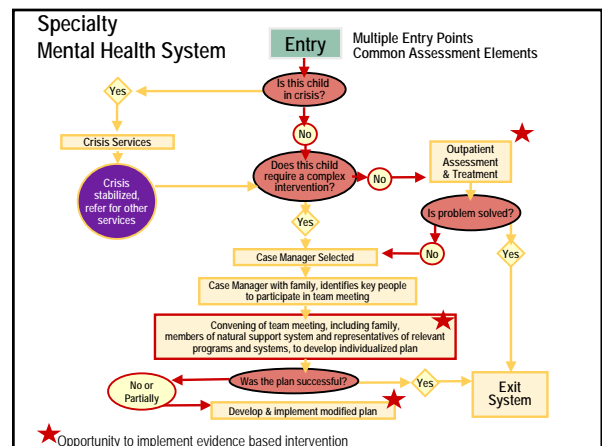
Knapp, 1995 p.12

“...the problem-solving ability of complex systems depends not on hierarchical control but on maximizing discretion at the point where the problem is most immediate.”

Elmore, 1979/80

Applicability of Evidence Based Interventions to Systems of Care

	Degree of Individualization	
	Low Individualization	High Individualization
Low Comparability		
High Comparability		MOST APPLICABLE





Conclusions

- ▶ Systems of care are a complex, evolving phenomenon in need of continued intensive study using a variety of research and evaluation methods.
- ▶ Relationships between policy/system level and practice level need to be emphasized and described in clear theories of change.
- ▶ Systems of care need to build their theories of change based on the experiences of children and families, values of the system, and the best available research findings.



Conclusions

The children's mental health field is largely divided between the practitioner community, the evidence based intervention community, and the systems of care community. Each has much to offer to the others and the gulf between them needs to be reduced.



Systems of Care and Evidence Based Interventions

Systems of Care would benefit from evidence based interventions:

- ▶ That work with diverse populations in natural settings.
- ▶ That prescribe principles and general processes but allow flexibility for adaptation to strengths and needs of individual children and families.
- ▶ That involve families and practitioners in the development of the interventions.



Credits:



This is a presentation, prepared by the Research and Training Center for Children's Mental Health, in support of its mission to improve services for children who have serious emotional/behavioral disabilities and their families.

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