Treating the Seriously Mentally Ill in Prison: Evaluation of a Contingency Management Program

Summary

• Purpose was to evaluate an in-prison program that incorporated a contingency management approach to the treatment of adult males who had significant mental health needs
• Impact was evaluated over a 1-year period using an assessment of individual change in mental and behavioral health outcomes

Data and Methods

• 58 incarcerated men in a maximum security prison
• Focus on misconduct and the mental health status of participants before and after program start using administrative data gathered by the Arizona Department of Corrections

Findings

• Program participation associated with positive individual-level outcomes
• Mental health watches, protective custody requests, and drug violations were reduced in the first year of programming
• Refusal to participate while in the program was associated with minor violations after the program

Implications

• Program presents a promising first step in understanding effective approaches to the treatment of mental illness
• Individual differences reinforced the importance of classification
• Programs need to consider the role of co-occurring risks and needs

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