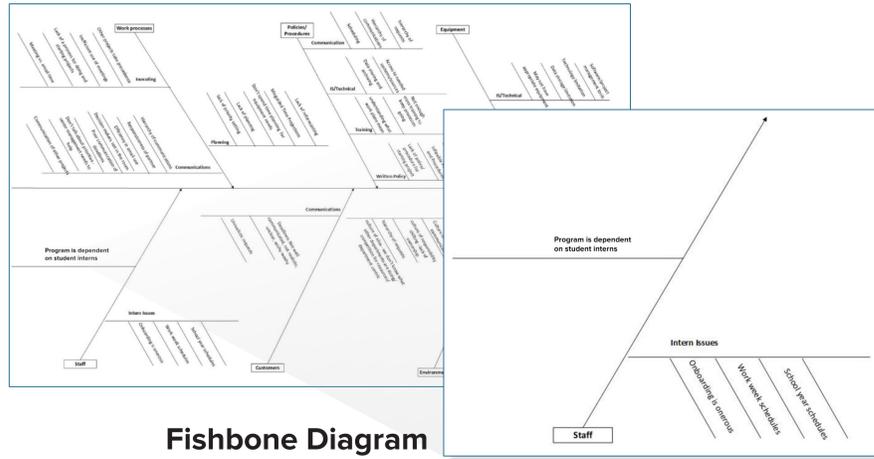


KEEPING ON AN EVEN KEEL: A QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT ADDRESSING FLUCTUATING SERVICE PROVISION CAPACITY

Karen Landovitz, LCSW
Jesse Wilkinson, MA



Fishbone Diagram

BACKGROUND

- GMHC's mental health program serves as a field-placement site to 5 social work/mental health counseling students each year. This increases the number and variety of clinicians who can provide services.
- The internship schedule follows the traditional school year, resulting in reduced service capacity in the summer and early fall. This can lead to temporarily suspending services to existing clients and creating a wait list of referrals for new clients – thus limiting continuity and timely access to care, which are vitally important to individuals with mental health care needs.
- In the spring, we initiated a CQI project to identify ways to maintain more consistent service capacity throughout the year.

METHODS

This project followed GMHC's agency-wide standardized CQI process:

- A brainstorming session was held to identify root causes of fluctuating capacity.
- Actionable solutions were generated, prioritized, and added to a work plan, in which staff were assigned responsibilities and deadlines.
- Outcome indicators were identified to measure the project's success.
- Going forward, progress will be monitored, assessed, and revised as needed.

RESULTS

- A number of factors were found to contribute to fluctuating capacity. In addition to limitations of the internship schedule, when new interns arrive, they are delayed in beginning to provide services while they become trained and well versed in service-delivery and documentation procedures; and program staff and supervisors must expend additional time and effort to train and supervise the new interns, leading to adjustments in their own caseloads and other responsibilities.
- Efforts to address these root causes are reflected on the work plan (see chart). Examples include: researching whether there are alternate internship rotations; considering the impact of initiating a two-cycle internship program on mental health staff and staff in GMHC programs that support our work; and reviewing our orientation and training process to see how it might become streamlined and more effective.
- To measure the impact on staff, we conducted an analysis of the time and effort involved in hosting interns and initiating a second internship cycle. Based on our experience hosting interns, we estimate needing about 5 hours/month of staff time to recruit for and select new interns. Once the interns arrive, staff will spend about 10 hours for general orientation and training, and staff who directly supervise interns will spend about 2.5 hours/week supervising each additional intern throughout their internship.
- As a result of measuring staff impact, we have a clearer sense of the demands on staff time. This will allow us to prepare more effectively for the arrival of new interns by making the necessary workload adjustments for supervisors of interns so they have sufficient time and availability.
- The project's success will be measured next summer, using the following outcome indicators: the increased number of clients who can be served over the course of the year, and the reduced wait time for services in the summer/early fall.

Goals and Objectives		SAMPLE WORK PLAN	
Title: Collaborative Mental Health Peak and Trough Improvement Project			
Goal: Establish an intern/field placement program that provides steady, increased capacity for the entire year			
Task Name	Step # (1,2,3)	Steps	Responsible Parties
Identify inefficiencies in training/on-boarding process for interns	1	Hold meeting with team to review last year's intern training procedures	Karen/Jesse
Identify inefficiencies in training/on-boarding process for interns	2	Write up findings of team brainstorm	Jesse
Identify more efficient procedures for training/on-boarding new interns	1	Hold meeting with team to review brainstorm data and identify solutions	Karen/Jesse
Determine # of interns who can be placed at any given time of the year	1	Identify # of work stations for interns	Bill
Determine # of interns who can be placed at any given time of the year	2	Assess clinical supervision capacity -- e.g., # supervisors available	Karen
Determine additional effort required by intern supervisors and other staff	1	Generate other staff time and effort required for each additional intern	Leon/Dave
Determine additional effort required by intern supervisors and other staff	2	Assess staff time spent contacting faculty advisors, selecting & interviewing interns	Dave/Karen
Determine other requirements to run year-long intern program	1	Determine time needed to prepare for training new cycle of interns	Karen
Determine other requirements to run year-long intern program	2	Determine time needed to train new interns in TREAT and programmatic procedures	Leon
Plan a new intern training program	1	Contact faculty advisors	Leon
Plan a new intern training program	2	Schedule interviews with intern candidates	Leon
Plan a new intern training program	3	Hold staff meeting to identify changes needed in training materials	Karen/Jesse
Plan a new intern training program	4	Hold interviews and select interns	Leon (with Karen and Dave)
Plan a new intern training program	5	Revise training materials	Karen/Leon

CONCLUSIONS

- This initiative provided us with an opportunity to examine and potentially re-conceptualize our current service-delivery model and intern training procedures to better meet the needs of our clients.
- Without engaging in this formalized CQI process, it is likely that we would have continued to explore and utilize temporary solutions, without identifying and addressing root causes and developing long-lasting and impactful changes.