Handout 8: Coordination of Services

Coordination in relation to case management involves having an understanding of the role of other services and developing cooperative working relationships with relevant services. It also means knowing when you have a shared client and who is doing what (with the client's consent).

Principles of Good Practice

The principles of good practice in coordination are:

- Each client receives coordinated services based on the support plan
- The service has an understanding and knowledge of other services in the community
- External agencies are involved when this serves the client's best interests
- Clients are in control of what services are involved
- Information is shared between services only with the permission of the client

Developing a Coordination Process

The key task in developing a coordination process may include:

1. Identifying relevant services - having a Directory of Services.
2. Networking with other services. This helps services identify common issues and any possible gaps or duplication of services.
3. Developing interagency protocols (e.g. procedures for making and receiving referrals).
4. Developing case conference guidelines.
5. Developing tools for coordination e.g. a referral form and a client consent form).
6. Developing written policy and procedures.

Making a Referral

Referring a client to another service involves much more than just giving out a phone number. It involves the following tasks:

- Giving the client information about the outside service and the services provided
- Gaining the client's consent to be referred to the service and for information to be passed on to the other service if necessary
• Checking with the other service
• Providing the service with the necessary information about the client that they may need, in order to assess whether they will be able to assist
• Making sure the client is given an appointment with the service
• Accompanying the client to the service if necessary
• Where relevant, follow up to make sure that the agency has been able to assist.

Informed Consent

Permission from the client should be given before any information about them or their children is given to another agency. Wherever possible this permission should be in writing.

Exceptions to Consent

There are exceptions when it is not possible or appropriate to obtain consent from a client before involving another agency. For example, if a child is being abused, if the client is at risk of self-harm or harming another person, or if the client is not fully conscious. In situations like these the service has a duty of care to involve another agency, with or without the client's permission.

Developing Tools for Coordination

Relevant tools for coordination with other services may include a referral form and a consent form for the release of information to or from another service.

Developing Written Policy and Procedures

The coordination processes are put into practice through the development of written policy and procedures and through staff training in these procedures.

Policy and procedures for coordination could include:

• The development and maintenance of a resource directory of other services
• Processes for networking with other services
• Interagency protocols and referral processes
• Guidelines for case conferencing
• Policy regarding informed consent and mandatory reporting
• Policy regarding networking with ethno-specific and migrant services
• Coordinating with other agencies in the development of support plans