

Introduction to *Federal Probation* Special Focus on Implementing Evidence-Based Practices

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Guest Editor

THIS SEPTEMBER'S ISSUE of *Federal Probation* is the second to feature a "Special Focus." In this case, the "Special Focus" attempts to improve the implementation of evidence-based practices (EBP) while expanding our understanding of the myriad relevant issues beyond the EBPs themselves. With such lofty goals, we sought the participation of leaders in the field, and I think you will agree that we have assembled a very strong list of authors, mixing emerging talent with justifiably established names in this area.

Guy Bourgon's "The Demands on Probation Officers in the Evolution of Evidence-Based Practice: The Forgotten Foot Soldier of Community Corrections" provides an important contribution to understanding the implementation of evidence-based practices in community corrections in two ways. First is Bourgon's succinct grasp and articulation of the importance of the role of pretrial services and probation officers in implementing evidence-based practices in community corrections. "It is in a closer look at specific details on operations, policies, directives, and how these play out during face-to-face officer/client supervision sessions that one can see the disconnect between real-world practice and what we know about what works (Bonta et al., 2008)." The choice for the line officer is either to embrace the initiative and be a part of its successful implementation or circumvent it and leave it to die on the vine.

Paparozzi and Guy's "The Trials and Tribulations of Implementing *What Works*: Training Rarely Trumps Values" embodies the essence of many of the pieces presented: The success of EBP is dependent on a range of factors well beyond the scope of the research,

process, principles, and tenets of the EBPs themselves. Paparozzi and Guy's article has particular value given the wide range of experience of the authors, including parole officer, assistant corrections commissioner, state parole board chairman, academic, trainer, and union organizer. From that wide experience comes the insight that too little attention in the literature is paid to these crucial factors: 1) implementation; 2) the skills, competencies, and passions of community corrections professionals; 3) organizational factors and issues; and 4) values essential to successful community corrections. Finally, in addressing why, the authors offer the following: "It might be that more attention to programs and less to organizational capital occurs because it is easier, if not safer, to talk about shortcomings of programs rather than ourselves."

Laying at least some of the blame for implementation failures at the foot of practitioners, Paparozzi and Guy single out the following causes: practitioners who 1) hold personal values antithetical to community corrections; 2) believe that punishment not rehabilitation should be the philosophy of community corrections; 3) don't believe that using EBPs can influence offender recidivism; 4) hold that training is not a path to professional development and (unless employed as a trainer) that training is not their responsibility. All of these identified values, if they truly exist in community corrections professionals, have destructive potential—making Paparozzi and Guy's article particularly thought-provoking.

Trotter's article "Reducing Recidivism Through Probation Supervision: What We Know and Don't Know from Four Decades of Research" provides a systematic review of

studies undertaken over the past four decades on the relationship between probation officer supervision skills and client recidivism rates. The review focuses on routine probation supervision rather than group or intensive supervision programs or other specialist interventions, making it particularly relevant to practitioners, since those cases represent the great majority of offenders processed. Eight studies were identified that met the criteria for the review. The studies indicated that when workers used particular practice skills, the recidivism rates of clients under their supervision were up to 55 percent lower than those of the clients of other supervisors, demonstrating the value of these techniques. Improvement rates for all other community corrections programming combined over those same 40 years (electronic monitoring, day reporting centers, workforce development, etc.) are dwarfed by the rates in the programming studied here. We have rightly come to expect a Trotter piece to offer significant contributions to the literature; amazingly, he never disappoints.

Our colleagues in Great Britain (with the apparent exception of Scotland) have (like us) struggled with the appropriate role of officers between the enforcement/monitoring role and the social work/treatment role; Raynor and Ugwudike report that Great Britain has (again like us) come to understand that the true solution lies in balancing the two roles rather than choosing between them. However, our colleagues across the pond seem to have developed their commitment to EBP generally and cognitive programming specifically a full decade sooner than we did, incorporating effective use of authority; anticriminal modeling and reinforcement; problem solving;

use of community resources; and quality of interpersonal relationships between staff and clients into their policies in 2004, while we are just now getting them into policy consistently. Finally, Raynor and Ugwudike cite observed and coded staff interactions as crucial to the successful implementation of the new methodologies, which provides further evidence that similar observation protocols are needed for successful implementation in the United States.

The article by Lowenkamp, Holsinger, Flores, Koutsenok, and Pearl measures the attitudes of probation officers and their motivation to use new supervision techniques. Interestingly, the simple survey conducted pre- and post-training possibly captures a level of ambivalence on the part of the training participants. The importance of the survey and article is that it indicates that officers, like others, might experience ambivalence about changing their roles. While the ambivalence seems to decrease post-test, organizations need to consider and address staff ambivalence in a functional way before embarking on any major changes.

Kathy Waters, Mario Moreno, and Brian Colgan provide a wonderful example of what inter-agency collaboration might really look like. Capitalizing on the existence of inter-agency relationships, the state, county, and federal probation systems in Arizona worked together to develop and support a

collaborative training and sustainability plan to develop officer supervision skills. While this project is still underway, their article provides a detailed picture of how working together builds a practitioner network to support new initiatives.

As the federal system is currently implementing Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Re-arrest (STARR), that system's experience is relevant to this issue. "Coaching: The True Path to Proficiency, From an Officer's Perspective" by Melissa Alexander, Lisa Palombo, Ed Cameron, Evey Wooten, Matthew White, Michael Casey, and Christopher Bersch, highlights the shift in the role of probation officers from strict monitoring to a balance of monitoring with what has come to be known as the "change agent" role. In teaching these core correctional practices, whatever the name (STARR, STICS, EPICS, JSTEPS), many agencies encounter difficulty implementing follow-up coaching. Given that the quality of the program implemented can significantly hinge on the effectiveness of officer skills, the value added from effective coaching is monumental.

For me, one sure sign that this collection of articles on a topic I am passionate about contains some real gems is my difficulty in selecting a favorite or most effective article; several could easily support such a designation. Among these is an entry by the

relatively less-known team of Rudes, Viglione, and Porter. Total Quality Management (TQM) and/or quality improvement (QI) models, probably most famously used by Japanese car companies after WWII through the present, have been around the criminal justice periphery for decades; Rudes et al. make a compelling argument for their relevance, significance, and potential as a central component in criminal justice EBP. While that may not seem very exciting, it is a feat that others have attempted with considerably less success. Summarizing their article will probably not do it justice; however, if by unhappy chance you can only read one article from this collection, be sure to make that article "Using Quality Improvement Models in Correctional Organizations."

Finally, Faye Taxman contributes an especially timely and necessary piece. While many of the other authors in this issue have focused on staff training and the new role of community supervision officers, Dr. Taxman grapples with implementation. The science on implementation is very well developed, and Dr. Taxman therefore can provide the reader with an "evidence-based approach" to implementing research-supported practices in corrections. The importance of considering the research on implementation and planning for implementation cannot be overstated. Dr. Taxman provides seven strategies that can assist agencies in making "EBPs stick."