

Abstract

Background. Community Psychiatric Services (CPS) in Hong Kong has been evolving for the past 30 years, from Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN) to Personalized Care Program (PCP) and Intensive Care Team (ICT). Telephone psychiatric care (Telecare) was used overseas to support psychiatric patients in the community. The Hospital Authority has launched the Mental Health Direct (MHD) Telecare service since 1st April 2012.

Aim. This study evaluated the effectiveness of the MHD Telecare service in maintaining the clinical gains in subjects stepped-down from PCP.

Methodology. This was a historically controlled study. The 12-month outcomes of 72 subjects receiving MHD Telecare service after PCP step-down were compared with those of 72 subjects receiving standard ambulatory care only. Primary outcomes were number of psychiatric admissions and length of stay. Secondary outcomes were Accidents and Emergency Department (AED) attendances for psychiatric reasons, ever missed Specialty Outpatient Clinic (SOPC) appointments, rate of missed SOPC appointments, reactivation of Community Psychiatric Services, and episodes of deliberate self-harm or suicidal attempts. This study was carried out in the Kowloon West Cluster, Hospital Authority, Hong Kong.

Results. A small number of psychiatric admissions and AED attendances for psychiatric reasons was found in both groups. No statistically significant deterioration in outcomes was found within both groups 12 months after PCP step-down. There were also no statistically significant differences in all outcomes between the treatment and control group.

Conclusion. In view of the clinical stability of subjects in both groups, the small sample size, and various methodological limitations identified, the validity and reliability of such negative findings was doubtful and conclusions regarding the effectiveness of MHD Telecare service could not be drawn. We recommended directions of future research to evaluate the effectiveness of MHD Telecare service, to generate more valid, reliable and generalizable results.

Declaration of interest. None