

Measuring what matters in mental healthcare

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It is important for regulators and policymakers to be able to distinguish between good and poor healthcare providers. They often find it useful to rank providers by overall performance, which requires a single (composite) measure. But it is difficult to get an overall assessment of performance when there are many aspects of quality and care that matter. Previous attempts to construct quantitative measures of overall healthcare provider performance have typically taken account of health benefits and financial costs. They have not included non-health related aspects of the care process such as how long patients wait for treatment or the way in which they are looked after during the care they receive.

We developed a novel method to measure the overall performance of mental healthcare providers. Non-health related aspects of care are particularly important in mental health services. This is because people may have prolonged interactions with providers. They therefore place a lot of value on patient experience, relationship building and continuity of care, over and above the health benefits they receive. Our methodology adds some measures of non-health benefits to those for health gains and costs.

We used estimates of how the general population values the non-health benefits compared to improvements in health. Then we applied these estimates to administrative and patient survey data to calculate a composite measure of performance. We expressed this measure in terms of costs and called it the “equivalent net health benefit”. We then compared rankings of providers using this measure.

Our findings showed that including non-health benefits such as person-centred care in the overall measure, makes a substantial difference to the evaluation of provider performance. Providers can change position in the rankings when non-health benefits are added to the composite rating. We concluded that it is both possible and important to take account of measures of non-health benefits, alongside health gains and costs, in performance assessment. This is especially valuable when considering providers of mental healthcare and our approach can help policymakers and regulators identify good and poor performance on dimensions that matter to people.

Read the full paper in [Social Science and Medicine](#). Read a [blog by the Health Foundation](#) about some of the other aspects of this project. This study was part of a larger [programme of research](#) funded by the Health Foundation's [Efficiency Research Programme](#).

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