An Administrative Model for Close Monitoring and Managing High Risk Individuals

Douglas A. Bigelow, Ph.D.¹, Joseph D. Bloom, M.D.¹, Mary Williams, M.S., J.D.¹, and Bentson H. McFarland, M.D., Ph.D.¹

The public expects central government to have immediate knowledge of the condition and circumstances of certain vulnerable or dangerous individuals such as insanity acquittees, and to take action in individual cases to protect the individual and the public. Therefore, such persons conditionally released to community settings require an unusual degree of close monitoring and management. Being immediately aware of the condition and circumstances of its assignees, together with other duties of a board or commission responsible for that monitoring and management, is largely an information management function.

The Psychiatric Security Review Board in Oregon is used to illustrate this unique mission, operations, and information management. In this paper, the Psychiatric Security Review Board is described in terms of its core and secondary businesses, together with a model information system that is based on information and information management processes actually employed by the Board. Copyright © 1999 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

Insanity acquittees share an important social status with only a few other groups. They represent a class of high-risk individuals of direct and intense interest to the governmental entity that is responsible for their welfare and their impact upon other people's welfare. This interest frequently takes the form of institutionalization justified as both “treatment” and “protection.” As a society, however, we

¹ Department of Psychiatry, Oregon Health Sciences University.
have long since decided that such persons should also enjoy a degree of liberty, and, consistent with public safety, they should live in the community rather than in institutional settings (Bloom, Williams, & Bigelow, 1991). In order to achieve these goals society must provide close monitoring and management in the most normal, unrestricted environment possible.

The Nature and Intensity of Public Interest

Insanity acquittees have long incurred a special interest among the general public, the press and government. High profile incidents involving persons judged not guilty except for insanity have occurred in every jurisdiction across the nation. Reichlin and Bloom (1993) described one such incident of a person with a history of violence who escaped from custody in the state capitol close to a sitting legislature. Another incident involved a person whose serious mental disorder had become exacerbated and who consequently caused a fatal motor vehicle accident (Leverette, Bloom, & Williams, 1994). Extensive media coverage, public debate, and ultimately in the second case several civil law suits made it abundantly clear that state level authorities are expected to know the condition of such persons at all times, to supervise them, and to exercise effective control in real time when conditions become potentially dangerous.

This phenomenon is not unique to insanity acquittees. For example, similar or analogous concern is raised regarding vulnerable children who have been designated a responsibility of central government (Gove, 1995) or when sex offenders are released into communities.

When sensational incidents occur involving these populations there is often a major public outcry which may be followed by a media storm, job reassignments, and new laws. However, aspects of the causes of the original incidents are not necessarily addressed. One such aspect is that little means actually exists for the government to closely and continuously monitor and manage potentially dangerous or vulnerable persons in real time.

THE PSYCHIATRIC SECURITY REVIEW BOARD—A CASE EXAMPLE

The Psychiatric Security Review Board (PSRB) is Oregon’s program for managing insanity acquittees. This program has been described extensively (Bloom & Williams, 1994). The program requires an unusual information system in order for it to be maximally effective in monitoring individuals on conditional release. This system must be designed to provide real-time monitoring of assignees relative to their case management plans. The information system should also be designed to support other PSRB operations—holding hearings, transmission of orders, accountability, and planning. Indeed, information is so central that PSRB operations could be viewed entirely through the prism of information management. In this paper we use PSRB as a case example and provide an analysis of PSRB business operations and a model information system required to support those operations. We present an idealized model which is becoming possible as a result of
the power and economy of small office computers, software, and communications. Components of this model are in place and others are under discussion.

**CORE BUSINESS OF PSRB**

The Core Business of the PSRB is to monitor assignees—in the forensic hospital and community—and to govern movement between the two (Figure 1). Through a conditional release plan and working with a local community mental health program the Board supervises assignees’ lives in the community, attempts to control the major hazards in their lives by setting the terms of conditional release, and manages emergencies centering on the PSRB assignee and ultimately by revocation and rehospitalization. The PSRB also ensures that the assignee receives due process and treatment for the mental disorder. We next discuss each of the core operations in detail.

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**Figure 1. Oregon's Psychiatric Security Review Board Program: business analysis**

**Legislative Accountability**
- Assurance of Public Safety
- Assurance of liberty and welfare of PSRB Assignees
- Assurance of probity, due care & attention, effectiveness, and efficiency
- Advice on legislation, regulation, policy, planning and implementation

**CORE BUSINESS**
- Monitor PSRB Assignees
- Supervise Conditionally Released PSRB Assignees (through Case Managers)
- Control PSRB Assignees (through status change)
- Manage PSRB Assignee Emergencies
- Provide due process to PSRB Assignees
- Treat PSRB Assignees’ Mental Disorders

**Mental Health Liaison**
- Coordination of planning, policy, programming, communications
- Monitoring of services provided to PSRB Assignees

**Public Relations, Issues Management, Communications**
- Monitor media, correspondence to state legislature, correspondence to PSRB and mental health agency
- Respond to inquiries, concerns, petitions, protests
- Publish information on public safety, humane perspectives on PSRB Assignees
- Manage information around crises, emergencies, and public debate

Close Monitoring in Community Settings

At one point in the history of managing potentially dangerous persons in the community, global prediction of dangerousness or risk was relied upon as a major means of averting negative outcomes. Such global predictions have not had a very dependable track record (Shah, 1981; Monahan, 1984). The result has been that potentially high-risk cases were not released into the community. Global prediction of dangerousness is reported to be improving (Rice, 1997), and, more recently, the focus has shifted to identification of specific risks and the specific means of managing those risks in the community. In the PSRB program, reliance is placed upon real-time close monitoring focused on specific risks and the specific conditions that control the risks, rather than upon global prediction of dangerousness.

A significant task for the PSRB is close monitoring of assignees who live in communities all over the state of Oregon. The centrally located PSRB must be aware of the key aspects of each assignee’s daily life on a real-time basis. Currently this information is provided by regular and as-needed status reports submitted by case managers, as shown in Figure 2. These status reports are compared with a proposed client management plan (“client status screen,” Figure 2). This type of monitoring process would require a structured set of data elements updated on-line.

An important component of close monitoring is the assignee’s mental status because the majority of specific risks among this population involve exacerbation of specific, idiosyncratic features of the individual’s mental illnesses. Substance use, paranoia, mania, depression, hostility, hallucinations, and delusions are key concerns. Similarly, specific, individual risk management strategies and conditions are critical to maintaining the person safely in the community. The assignee’s medication compliance, residential location, personal contacts, social adjustment, daily activity, legal involvement, and treatment status are also subject to the PSRB’s close monitoring. This structured information must be routinely updated by people at the front line—immediately in the case of significant change.

SUPERVISION

The purpose of close monitoring is to enable the PSRB to manage assignees according to a specific, individual plan. Supervision requires quick, reliable, measured, precisely targeted, and effective action. For example, if an assignee becomes delusional in content which, in the past, has led to difficulties, the PSRB may decide to impose additional conditions. The situation may require additional security at the assignee’s residential placement to prevent wandering (based on an assessment of the specific risk in the assignee’s management plan that certain delusions lead to wandering, leading, in turn, to possible violent confrontations).

Supervisory decisions must be communicated to the front line case managers quickly, reliably, and clearly (the “case management plan” incorporated into the “client status screen” shown in Figure 2). The case manager must implement those supervisory decisions quickly, reliably, and without fail. There is little room for delay in obtaining the order or failing to implement it. Even if the state level decision is no better than one made at the front line, the social expectation places
responsibility at the central level. Finally, results of those changes must be conveyed back to the PSRB.

**Assignee Status**

Management extends beyond supervising an assignee according to a plan. Beyond supervision is establishing (or revising) a plan which, in part, controls the PSRB.
assignee through conditional release, revocation, and discharge statuses. PSRB uses certain formal procedures to decide upon the status of an assignee, under statute, regulation, and policy. The PSRB has a very great responsibility to maintain control of the assignee’s status at all times by ordering the assignee’s detainment, hospitalization, conditional release, or discharge.

The main formal procedure is a PSRB hearing. Hearings are required at certain times—after the first six months, every two years thereafter, upon request by the assignee, and within a certain number of weeks after the PSRB initiates an emergency detention and hospitalization. Several operations are involved in the hearing (see Figure 2). The assignee must be notified. Board members must be provided with a case summary. Victims must be notified if the options of conditional release or discharge are to be considered. Having previously consulted with case management and other involved parties, the PSRB staff puts a proposed case management plan before the Board for consideration. The Board considers the case summary, testimony, and other evidence, then deliberates, decides, and issues orders.

These orders potentially update the case management plan. The orders are recorded by the PSRB staff and conveyed to the parties who must carry them out, mainly the case manager in the event of conditional release. As part of close monitoring, the PSRB staff will obtain confirmation of the implementation and results of the orders issued by the Board.

Due Process

Assignees are entitled to due process that must be handled properly. The Board should consider evidence properly and should decide its course of action fairly and wisely; and then issue orders that are clear, and feasible, and related to the Board’s actual intent. One purpose of the model information system is to document clearly the Board’s consideration of evidence, deliberations, decisions, and orders. Using that information, improvements may be made through better selection and training of Board members.

Potential deficiencies in Board procedure include the failure to call hearings when required by law, failure to notify participants, provision of inadequate case summaries, failure to record orders reliably, failure to transmit orders promptly and fully, or failure to determine whether orders have been implemented and what the results were. A model information system, as proposed, substantially reduces deficiencies of this type. The functions of such an information system are automatic scheduling of hearings, drafting of notifications, generation of case summaries, structured recording of orders, transmission of orders, and incorporation of orders into the treatment and management plan used in close monitoring. Due process is thus preserved for the assignee in these relatively important matters.

Emergency Management

As we have described, close monitoring and management are essential components of a program such as the PSRB; however, even such supervision and control will not prevent misadventures such as described earlier, which can throw the
whole program into crisis. Only on rare occasions do things start to go very badly wrong, very quickly. With the type of information system described in place, the PSRB will have the quickest and best possible notice of this emergency. Upon this “red alert”, management of the emergency becomes the absolute priority.

Not only must notification of PSRB staff occur quickly, the notification must also be delivered on a priority basis to the person who is authorized to issue emergency orders (interrupting any other ongoing activity at any time of the day or night, any day of the year). It should be noted that what the PSRB recognizes as a very serious emergency in progress may not be so recognized by the police, 911 respondent, hospital emergency room, or other emergency agencies. So, there is no substitute for PSRB directing the process.

There must be a means of confirming the nature of the emergency prior to, or simultaneously with, issuance of emergency orders. There must be the capacity to transmit credible emergency orders immediately to those who can carry them out. Finally, there must be a means of reviewing the incident to validate the actions taken.

One of the critical techniques available to the PSRB is the identification of “triggers” and other signals of assignee vulnerability or potential dangerousness. This is the result of specific, individual risk assessment. For example, the emergence of delusions of persecution in certain cases may, in the past, have been a precursor to a rapidly developing, serious dangerousness in an assignee otherwise suitable for community living. In other cases, the first use of certain psychoactive substances (even something as innocuous as caffeine) is a similar precursor. Incorporation into the model information system of these individual characteristics as “red alert flags” provides a means to initiate automatically an emergency notification (see Figure 2). The same procedure can be built into the information system at lower levels of urgency as well.

**Informational Support to Core Business**

We have described information supports for PSRB operations *inter alia*. At this point, we will elaborate on certain features of the model information system that were only touched on above. The information supports currently available to the PSRB are at various stages of automation; however, the model system shown in Figure 2 is based on actual information and actual information management currently in effect at the PSRB. Paper records and manual operations have merely been automated in the model.

The central feature of the model information system shown in Figure 2 is a database record containing the assignee’s full history, including every order, every status report, every service, and emergency flags. There are information inputs (court assignment and conditions, hearing requests, orders, updates, law enforcement data system records, confirmations) and information output functions (hearing notices, case summary, orders, emergency reports, exception reports, and statistical reports). A fundamental design principle is entering decisions and events where and when they take place. The information system then returns derivative and calculated information when and where needed. Behind the scenes
are information processing routines (scheduling, comparison of updates with plan, and emergency flags).

**DISCUSSION**

In summary the information management system described in this paper has various important functions. In an agency such as the PSRB the database is used in operations for multiple purposes such as scheduling, alerting, and displaying current status. By scheduling hearings, notifying participants, ensuring the input of required information, structuring the issuance and transmission of orders, and keeping track of these events, a model automated information system enables the agency to much more effectively carry out the multiple aspects of its core business plan, its mission.

Further, by keeping track of mental health services (as per assignee management plan) the model information system not only facilitates the agency’s mission of treating the assignee’s mental disorder but also facilitates the liaison with the state mental health agency that is charged with actually providing the treatment (for example, to report failure to deliver ordered services). In addition, the service data facilitates PSRB input into state mental health agency planning and policy making (for example, identifying the need for more intensive case management to avert revocations).

Most important is that a highly automated, well designed information system (such as the one envisioned in Figure 2) conveniently accepts information about an emergency at any hour and transmits the information to the proper authority in the proper way. Further, the information system is designed to recognize emergency information automatically. For example, the system may be designed to access information on police contact as that information is entered into law enforcement data systems. The system could launch an automated query to the LEDS in the advent of police contact with a PSRB assignee e.g., “This is a PSRB client. Has he taken his medications? Does he have them on his person? Does he have a way of returning to his residence?”

In its core business, the PSRB acts for the executive branch of government, but it also has an important relationship to the legislative branch of government. Legislative accountability consists of statistical performance reports demonstrating the assurance of public safety; optimal provision of liberty, welfare, and due process to the assignees; and effective and efficient program operations (Figure 1). These reports are generated from the database in the model information system (Figure 2).

Further, the PSRB, based on its own experience with PSRB assignees as well as expertise in the field, provides advice on legislation, regulation, policy, planning, and implementation. For example, the cost avoidance potential of conditional release using intensive case management has been demonstrated (McFarland & Bigelow, 1993; Bigelow, Bloom, & Williams, 1990).

One other important mission of an agency such as the PSRB is public relations. Beyond merely delivering an effective service of monitoring, supervising, controlling, and managing the emergencies of persons assigned to the PSRB, the agency must also deal with public perception and concerns. The PSRB must monitor the
media; respond to correspondence directed to the legislature, the state mental health agency, or itself; and respond to inquiries, concerns, petitions, and protests. The PSRB must proactively issue information on public safety and promote humane perspectives pertaining to the management of vulnerable and dangerous mentally ill persons.

For small groups of vulnerable or dangerous persons, ranging from abused children to insanity acquittees, the administrative model described in this paper provides a means of successfully meeting the public’s expectations of central government. Required for these unique types of program are clearly focused mission statements, a set of efficient operations, and an information system specially designed to enable the agency to meet its goals and the high set of expectations placed on the agency by the public, and by higher echelons of government. As illustrated, developing such an information system requires a very sound analysis of the core business objectives of the agency. This is now in reach of many such agencies with the extraordinary power and economy of current small office computers, software, and communications. Such models should become commonplace in the near future.

REFERENCES


