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A National Scan of Psychiatric Involuntary Hold Policies

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Background

- Psychiatric involuntary holds are used to assess individuals who may be a danger to their self or others because of mental illness.
- The criteria can often be initiated by any ordinary citizen, and then include a time limit during which a qualified examiner must complete an assessment.
- Individuals are assessed for certain criteria, as outlined by the state’s statutes.
- About 18.7% of holds lead to commitment for treatment.
- Length of holds has been linked to outcomes.
- About 26.83% of states have a hold time of 72 hours, which must complete an assessment.
- California’s Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) has become a model for involuntary psychiatric hold policies.
- The MHSA set the standard of “danger to self and others” as a criteria for involuntary holds.
- This examination of the states’ and the District of Columbia’s statutes was created to describe the current landscape of psychiatric involuntary holds.

Methods

- The process started with a comprehensive search of state policies.
- There was much more variation in hold times than expected.
- Each state’s statute was collected, and pertinent information was recorded.
- Four variables were conceptualized to describe the most important parts of involuntary hold policy:
  1. Length of hold
  2. Who can initiate hold
  3. Criteria for a hold
  4. Who can do assessment
- Subfactors for each variable were categorized.
- Each state’s statute was then coded, counted, and percentages were calculated using Excel.
- Several maps were created to visualize the results.

Results

- Table 1 shows how many states required a person to have certain qualifications to initiate a hold. Many states listed multiple qualifications, or required multiple individuals to be involved in the initiation of a hold.
- Table 2 shows the number of criteria for involuntary holds.
- Table 3 shows the number of states that included criteria for a hold in each category.

Discussion

- There was much more variation in hold times than expected.
- Less than 50% of states had a hold time of 72 hours, which has become a standard set by states like California and Florida.
- Length of holds has been linked to outcomes.
- 69% of the states allow someone to initiate a hold. This allows the community to take more action in helping individuals experiencing mental illness.
- Every state and D.C. included danger of harm to others or self as criteria for a hold.
- 61% included lack of insight as a criteria. This could be because it is much more subjective than the other criteria.

Works Cited

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