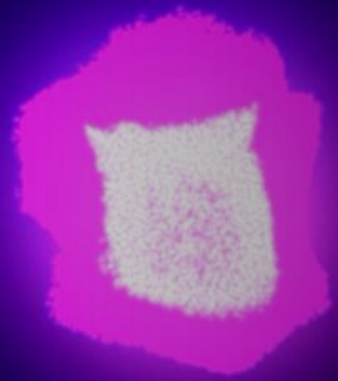
The use of technology in the probation context



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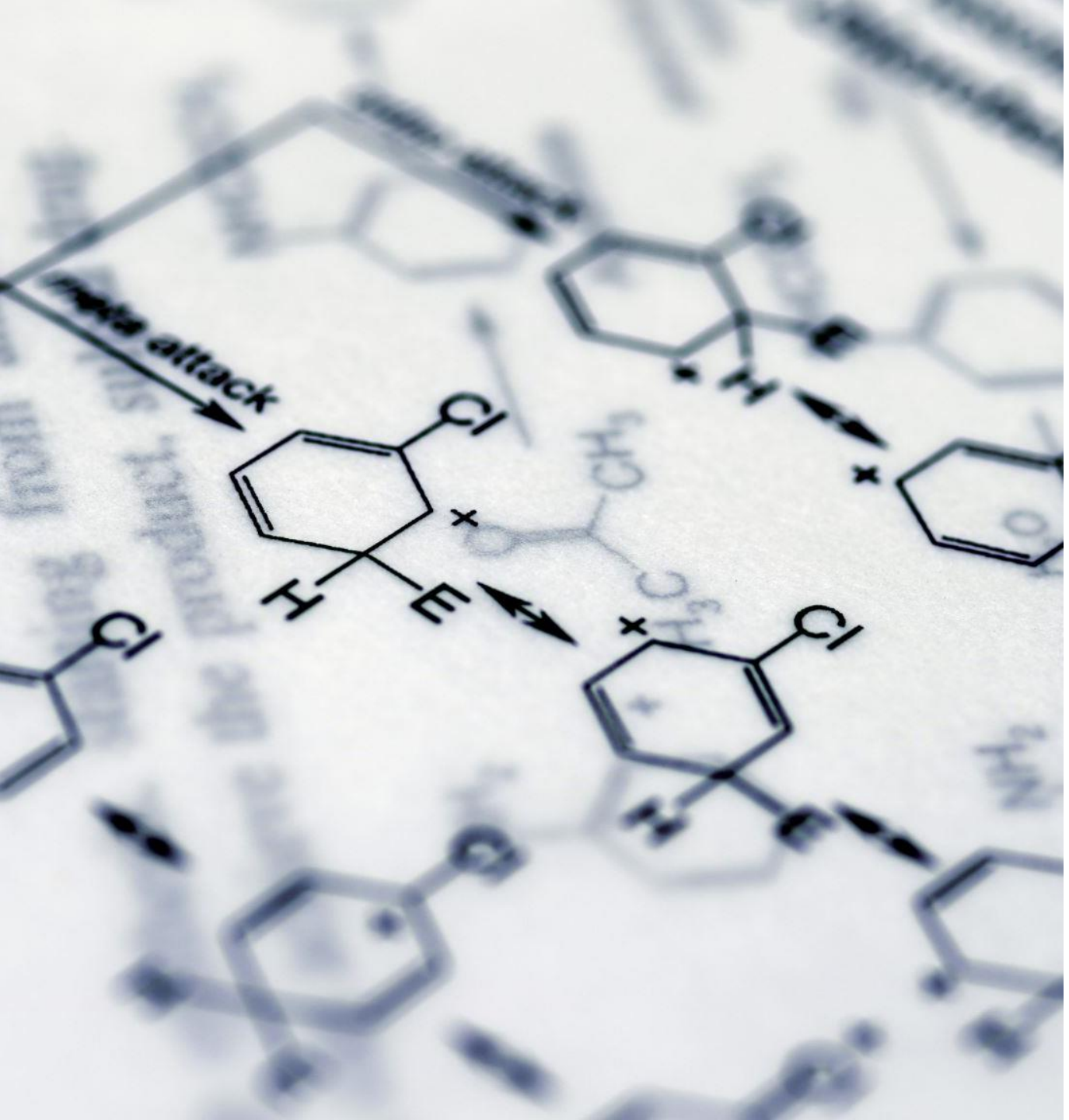
Aim of the presentation

- To review the existing technologies
- Look over their performance
- Estimate some further developments



What is technology?

- Oxford dictionary:
  - the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes
  - machinery and equipment developed from the application of scientific knowledge

Therefore – a broad definition – 'the application of scientific knowledge' – not only phisical equipment

Existing technologies used in probation

- Many ways to clasify them:

  - historical – following their time of introduction: first generation – the telephone

  - the purpose – to monitor clients, to support behavioural change, to create databases etc.

  - their nature – wearable devices (EM), rehabilitation programmes and tools (e.g. risk assessment)

Existing technologies used in probation – an inventory

- Rehabilitation tools
- Monitoring equipments
- Databases

Recently – no clear cut

Rehabilitation tools

- Risk assessment tools – for clasification and case management planning – e.g. Risc, Brick, OASys etc.
- Scales and questionnaires – e.g. Working Alliance Inventory (Horvath, 1992),
- Programmes – individual or groupwork – e.g. Targets for change, One to One etc.
- Automated programmes or digitally enabled programs – Interlink or Timewise (prisons), MAPIT (probation)

MAPIT

(for more, see Walters et al, 2013)

- Motivational Assessment Program to Initiate Treatment
- Web-based intervention to increase motivation for substance abuse treatment among clients
- Based on extended paralle process model, motivational interviewing and social cognitive theory
- Two sessions:
  - Targets motivation to complete probation and take up the drug treatment (at the begining)
  - Focuses on goal setting, coping strategies and social support (after 30 days from begining)
- Example: is asking the client what are the most important reasons to complete probation. Based on that it sends emails and sms to encourage the client stay on track. It uses also text-to-speech to send voice messages.
- Provides almost personalized feedback and motivational messages ('some other people in this situation did this and that ... Please think of what might work for you.')
- Clinical trial – clients highly committed and succesfully completed probation
- Randomised control trial with 600 clients in Baltimore and Dallas

Rehabilitation tools – observations

- Aim primarily at changing offending behaviour
- Manualized
- Work towards standardization and cross service consistency
- Intensivly evaluated – most of them effective in reducing reoffending and supporting desistance – at least in controlled environment
- Most of them based on RNR but including increasingly Desistance
- Good Live Model (GLM) on the rise – promissing programmes for sex offenders
- More and more comuter assisted or data driven interventions

Monitoring tools

- Telephone – eprobation
- Finger print devices – e.g. Geogia Probation Service
- Probation kiosks – E&W (report kiosks)
- Electronic monitoring
  - Radio frequency
  - GPS
  - 'Dirty technologies' (Nellis, 2018) – Conducted Energy Devises
- Breathalizer
- Apps – e.g. Changing Lives
- Use of social media (dabatable!)

Monitoring tools – evaluation

- Vasty non-evaluated in terms of effectiveness – **exception EM** – largely effective during the monitoring period but not-sustainable change unless accommpanied by transformative interventions (Bonta et al, 2000; Sugg et al, 2001; Renzema, 2012) – other benefits (e.g. increase survival time)
- The **use of telephone** in remote supervision – during the pandemic on staff perceptions (Dominey et al, 2021; Herzog-Evans and Sturgeon, 2022):
  - Use of telephone was successful in less complex and more routine cases
  - Can be an occazional part of the blended supervision where there is already a good WA
  - The need for more training, procedures and smartphones which can offer more possibilities
  - Need for discretion – to decide when and with whom
  - Better work-life balance for POs
- These effects are deeply dependant on the orgaizational culture, the institutional arrangements, access to technology and so on.

Use of technology in probation – criticism

- Increases the discrimination gap for those under-educated or with less access to technology – vulnerable digital divide
- Hamper the WA
- Legitimacy of probation work harder to maintain (McNeill, 2020)
- Technology has a negative impact on probation staff for not being able to provide a good level of services (Armstrong and Pickering, 2020)
- 'sense of loss' and depersonalized assessment (Philips, 2017)

Use of technology – Research evidence

- Smart apps improved outcomes with mental health or drug use (McGreevy, 2017)
- Telephone and acess to internet on the go improved productivity (Fagan, 2017)
- Computerized motivational interventions outperformed traditional probation regarding treatment initiation (Lerch et al, 2017)
- Game assisted risk assessment more acccurate than traditional risk assessment (Ormachea et al, 2017)
- Video therapy as effective as in-person theraphy (Fernandez et al, 2021)
- Phone-only therapy is effective (Irvine et al, 2020)
- Other advantages:
  - Involve little staff contact – increase cost-effectiveness
  - Allow better data collection and follow-up
  - Little loss of fidelity (Hester and Miller, 2006)
  - Computer based assesment more valid than face-to-face interviews – especially on delicate issues such as drug use (Joinson et al, 2007)
  - The same efficacy as in-person interventions with alcohol and drug use (Moore et al, 2011; Thorsteinson et al, 2010)

Technology in probation – some final observations

- Recently introduced in probation – eprobation (Herzog-Evans and Sturgeon, 2022)
- Quite a lot of resistance – main criticism it hampers the quality of relationship – but look into psychoterapy – maybe other skill sets?
- Little research on effectiveness – with robust methodologies
- More and more integration – monitoring/rehabilitation/data management - apps
- Less developed than in the prison sector – see smart prisons in Finland – VR for rehabilitation, AI for offender management
- US is taking the lead in this direction with automated programmes and apps
- It seesms that a closer private/public/university relathinship can increase innovation and creativity
- Careful development accompanied by careful ethical, normativ and pragmatic considerations ??

Thanks!

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