

Engagement with electronic monitoring and allied technologies

Electronic monitoring (EM) technologies are useful tools but only when they operate within a system which provides effective support to monitored individuals. Providing adequate support involves people – at the very least the individuals being monitored and those individuals who are monitoring them. The emphasis of programmes between the three main purposes of EM devices - control, care and convenience (Micheal et al, 2006) – differs between countries, over time and with different individuals. Control may be the dominant focus when the technologies are used to monitor individuals identified as high risk. Whilst the technologies cannot eradicate risk completely, they assist with managing risk by imposing time and location restrictions in real time and/or retrospectively. Information gleaned from EM technologies provides concrete evidence which can be used in supervision rather than relying solely on the statements of service users. A second equally important goal of EM is to support behaviour change and reduce re-offending. EM technologies can support wearers' efforts to change their behaviours and alcohol monitoring technologies and apps not only provide support but also have preventive effects.

The growing use of technologies presents challenges to probation staff to use these resources wisely and effectively to maximise their potential to meet the probation goals of control, support and behaviour change. Technologies provide more opportunities than any one or group of professionals can offer and are more effective than the face to face intervention alone. By embedding technologies into the supervisory relationship, staff can increase their capacity and impact. For these reasons, it would be expected that professionals would embrace the opportunities afforded by new technologies. Instead, however, they appear to resist them, even when they are proven to be effective. Healthcare research suggests that the key to understanding this counter intuitive behaviour lies in the professional culture of probation. This culture sees the supervisory relationship and professional judgement as central to success. Technology is viewed as a threat to these strongly held principles and therefore a danger to the very essence of probation practice. Consequently, the task is not only to use technologies well but ensure that they become an accepted part of everyday probation practice.

These conclusions result in many questions for probation organisations. How to maximise engagement of staff and service users with electronic monitoring and allied technologies? What are the benefits for staff of using electronic monitoring and other technologies? What are the benefits for service users of greater use technologies in probation practice? In what ways can data collected via EM and other technologies be used to support the work of staff and the goals of probation? This presentation will address these questions and suggest strategies to improve staff engagement with EM and allied technologies.