

Remote Supervision: What did we learn?

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What did we do?

- Research participants were practitioners in three English Community Rehabilitation Companies
- Fieldwork between July and September 2020
 - Online survey (79) Semi-structured interviews (12)
- Interviewees (10 women, 7 PSO's and 5 PO's, less than a year<experience<more than 20 years)
- Asked about remote supervision (what, how, how often, how well, how suitable)
- Focus was on the impact on practice. We were not looking directly at how it felt to be working through the pandemic or from home, although of course these issues arose.

The Experience of Technology

'But it's a small little Nokia block phone. It's hard to use it to text. And sometimes it's hard to hear people and you have to ask them to repeat things.' (Rebecca)

'I dread being seen as incompetent because of how clunky our computers are in our interview rooms. It takes ten minutes to set up your computer and get into your [secure] environment... and then you find the resource, or you've got a website or a thing in mind you want to do with that person, then you find it's security locked and you can't access it..' (Lena)



Three themes

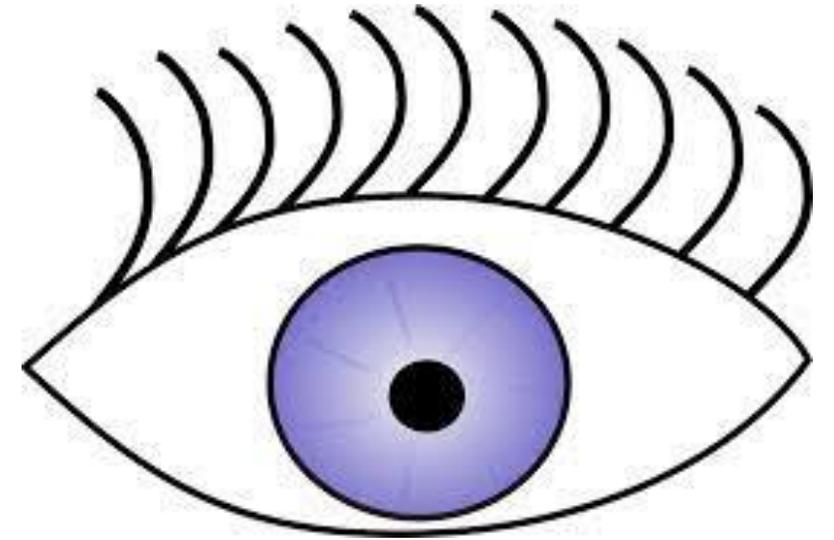
- Sense and supervision
- Relationships and remote supervision
- Looking to the future

Sense and supervision

'conversation isn't just about what's being said, it's about how it's being said, your body language, are you being threatening, are you being open, you use gestures a lot to get your point across, so having a visual contact is preferable'
(Paul)

'You might be able to tell over the phone if they are under the influence, slurring their words and things like that, but some people are really good at hiding it. If they actually come into the office I can see, I can smell, so things like that really help.'
(Rebecca)

'I'm not getting a good feel for them as I haven't been able to sit in a room and see them and I appreciate they probably feel the same about me.'
(Gemma)



Relationships and remote supervision

'I've only just realised how much of it [the job] I do by looking pleasant, and you know I'm quite smiley, I'm quite friendly - and if people don't hear that on the phone, I think possibly I sound a bit sharper on the phone, as it were, I talk quite fast... which probably makes a difference to people... I have had to work on talking more consciously slowly. I think possibly the way I come across if people haven't spoken to me before is just less approachable, maybe, on the phone, because I think I'm doing a lot of work with my body language' (Claire)

'I have found telephone discussions to be more open and engaging with some service users than face to face - one has said that he so hates just coming into the office (everything it represents for him), that he is in a state of agitation before seeing me, and so the first period of supervision is spent supporting him to relax (and this service user has been on licence for some years now); we do not have to go through this on the phone and the difference in engagement is remarkable.' (Survey comment)



But what sort of relationship?

- 'they just pick up their phone....At the end of the day, they've answered you and you've contacted them.' (Nicola)
- 'Service users have the benefit of feeling like they are in a two-way relationship with their Programme Facilitators because they can easily contact them (with a message) on the phone, rather than simply being required to turn up to meetings with a group. This must encourage the impression that they are equal and responsible agents in their own rehabilitation, so improving their engagement and receptiveness' (Survey comment)

Looking to the future

'I can't do that over the phone... so I might say "right, I'm sending you a link" and I would text or email a link and then we've both got the same thing in front of us.' (Claire)

'there's so much out there and we are probably missing a few tricks by not using these resources... We might not even know about them ourselves' (Nicola)



Questions and discussion

Remote contact is a very useful option with the right service user; hopefully one legacy of the pandemic will be an increased recognition of this and a corresponding extension of trust to individual officers to determine when and for whom this option is used.' (Survey comment)

'I don't think we ever would have gone to this phone contact if it hadn't been these exceptional circumstances. It's been forced to come in. But there certainly have been some benefits... it's the mixture that's needed. That balance between the two.' (Deborah)

