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Letter From the Editor



Why Caseloads Matter

In 2009 researchers from the University of Queensland in Australia set out to measure how the size of a case manager's caseload impacted on-the-job stress, overall job function and the ability to competently fulfill one's job duties.

"Little is known about the extent to which caseload management tools are used in routine service management, and anecdotal reports suggest that caseload monitoring is typically informal," writes lead researcher Robert King, an associate professor at the Queensland School of Medicine.

Yet the payoff for closer attention to caseloads is evidently critical. Following his study of some 200 behavioral health case managers, King concludes: "Higher caseloads were associated with higher levels of work-related stress and lower levels of case manager personal efficacy." But that's not all: "Active monitoring of caseload was associated with lower scores for work-related stress and higher scores for case manager personal efficacy, *regardless of size of caseload.*" [italics mine]

As King's study suggests, caseload management supersedes the size of a caseload or any other quantifying factors. While size remains one of the key issues, it is simply another part of the overarching management process.

And that's where this special report comes in. With articles penned by some of the leading figures in caseload study, this guidebook provides a clear-cut picture of what's at stake when it comes to securing caseloads, and it illustrates the strategies that department heads as well as frontline case managers (and related professionals) can use to create a satisfactory caseload program.

I have the honor of introducing Kathy Craig, MS, RN-BC, CCM, one of the preeminent voices in caseload research, as the guest editor of this special report. Ms. Craig will serve as our guide throughout the length of the book, treating us to insightful commentary and adding vigor to the takeaways contained in each of the sections ahead. I invite you to flip forward a few pages and, to use one of Ms. Craig's signature phrases, begin the journey on how to "right-size" caseloads.

Best practices,

Richard Scott
Managing Editor
Case In Point | Dorland Health
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Letter from Guest Editor



Getting Caseloads Right

In this special report, *Case In Point* asks authors to help crystallize the most salient points about caseloads. Especially central are two questions: “Why does the topic of caseloads remain a hot-button issue?” and “What’s at stake?” My particular emphasis on the second question is, “What’s at stake if we get the answer wrong or too muddled to produce a good workable answer?”

The articles in this special report draw from the expertise of the contributing authors and their experiences in the practice settings in which they have honed their caseload aptitudes. It is our ambition to provide content that clarifies the issues surrounding caseloads in ways that do produce good workable answers and that crystallize the elements comprising the hot-button topic of right-sized caseloads within the action-oriented consciousnesses of both front-office deciders and frontline doers.

Ah, caseloads! To many professionals, the number of cases you have in your caseload means you’re going to have a terrible workday. To others, it means practically nothing. Caseloads in the form of patients-to-practitioner ratios are either the stuff that causes states to institute mandatory staffing laws, or they vary too much to even engender engaging in meaningful conversations about them. In the latter’s way of thinking, “A caseload is a caseload is a caseload,” or else the topic of caseloads is too big, too hairy, or too slippery to try to get a good handle on. The caseload weight, or acuity-weighted caseload, is either a crucial determinant of effectiveness set up as criteria that drive best-practice performance, satisfaction and outcomes; or, it doesn’t rate as a project significant enough for business leaders to invest company resources to find out about it.

Between these extremes, there exists some real business intelligence and concrete accountability issues and deliverables. I guarantee you the intelligence is worth the business investment. And mark my words: the accountabilities surrounding caseloads are only going to grow in importance and visibility.

Let’s use the authors’ insights in these articles to examine several caseload fundamentals, such as strategies to optimize caseloads, the impact of caseloads in independent settings and the effect of a case manager’s personality and professional style on caseload management.

Be sure to send me your thoughts about any ideas, questions or feedback that this report inspires. Make no mistake about it, your voice is important to the caseloads dialogue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Craig, MS, RN".

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