Opportunities and Challenges in Using Claims/Encounter Data in Addiction Health Services Research

Sponsor - Brandeis/Harvard NIDA Center to Improve System Performance of SUD Treatment

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Claims and encounter data are commonly used in addiction health services research and offer a wealth of information on individual-level utilization and charges for treatment services and medications. These claims and encounter data remain a fundamental source of information for large populations, alongside the emerging use of electronic health records and patient reported information. In this interactive workshop, we will address both general issues in using claims and encounter data for health services research and also explore the unique aspects of using these data for addiction-focused studies. We begin with a broad definition of claims and encounter data, and a discussion of what types of research questions are suitably addressed using this data. Next, we address how the source of the information, clinicians and health systems recording client data, affects the completeness and accuracy of the data. We will offer an overview of current sources of claims and encounter data (e.g., Medicaid, Medicare, commercial health plans, Veterans Administration, state agencies for substance abuse or behavioral health, state-level all payor systems, multi health plan data systems), and the path to obtaining this data for research. We continue with a discussion of how claims and encounter data are generally structured and the implications for research, e.g., impact on longitudinal research of changes in diagnosis coding influence of how race/ethnicity is coded on disparities studies. Because claims data can be more powerful when combined with other administrative data sources (e.g., criminal justice, employment, education, vital statistics), we outline how to address data linkage.

Learning Objectives

- Identify specific sources of claims and encounter data, including Medicaid, Medicare, commercial health plans, Veterans Administration, state agencies for substance abuse or behavioral health, state-level all payor systems, multi health plan data systems.
- Assess the opportunities for addiction health services research using claims and encounter data.
- Evaluate potential barriers and identify approaches to overcoming them.