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JUSTICE PROGRAMS OFFICE

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

**BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE (BJA) DRUG COURT
CLEARINGHOUSE**

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FACT SHEET SERIES: Frequency of Review Hearings
Conducted by Juvenile Drug Courts and the Correlation with Success Rates**

Subject: Frequency of Review Hearings Conducted by Juvenile Drug Courts and the Correlation
with Success Rates
From: Caroline S. Cooper, Director, BJA Drug Court Clearinghouse
Date: December 9, 2006

QUESTION

The following inquiry is from Kristen McAuley, Family and Juvenile Drug Court Coordinator in Augusta, Maine, regarding the frequency of review hearings conducted by juvenile drug courts and any research or other findings which correlate the frequency of hearings with graduation rates or other indicia of "success" for juvenile drug court participants:

One of our juvenile drug court judges was interested in learning whether there existed any research on the impact on success in juvenile drug court treatment/graduation rates of the frequency of appearance before the drug court judge. Currently our juvenile drug courts meet every week, but we're curious as to whether a biweekly schedule could potentially negatively impact the juveniles. I know some information exists for this pertaining to adults, but am not sure about juveniles.

RESPONSES

CALIFORNIA

Wanda King
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My observances and my gut feeling tell me that during Phase I they absolutely must be seen once a week. Remember, kids so often put off the easy things until the last minute. Seeing a judge every two weeks, well, they don't even think until the second week that they need to hurry up and do what they were supposed to do.

As for Phase II, I would still go with twice a month and from that point they may be able to individualize their schedule for court visits. I hope someone does do some research on this – it would be interesting and helpful.

FLORIDA

Judge John Parnham (ret.)
First Judicial Circuit Court
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I don't know about research data, but I think, given the characteristics of juvenile drug abusers, including their level of developmental maturity, the more frequent the monitoring the better. Our experience (adult drug court, juvenile drug court, juvenile domestic violence court, dependency drug court and our traditional system Dependency Court Outcome Enhancement Project, all of which included more frequent court monitoring) indicates that treatment supports more frequent monitoring and that the participants felt it was more beneficial for them. We have used both weekly and bi-weekly appearances in our dependency drug court and everyone agreed the weekly was better. If the program wants to experiment, perhaps they could start with weekly and use the biweekly appearance as an incentive.

Kelly Zarle
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As a general rule of thumb we always pass our newest clients to the very next court date for at least their first month; once a client is acclimated to the program and following the program rules, he/she may be passed bi weekly or monthly as they progress through the program. This hasn't seemed to hinder our juvenile's progress at all and instead acts as an incentive; if a client is doing well enough to be passed for an extended period of time they know they have the trust and respect of the drug court team. Conversely if a client is continuously in violation of the JDC contract they are seen frequently and they know that they are in need of and under constant supervision.

In my experience, the quality of the court visit is more important than the frequency. If the Judge/Magistrate has a smaller calendar for that day because we were able to pass clients for an extended period of time he/she is able to take the time to discuss individual issues with each client and the client walks out of the court room feeling more invested in the program because they are getting significant feedback in the courtroom. Clients begin to really work for things that they know will earn them praise at their next court date. For example, juveniles try harder in school when they know their progress report will be given extra attention in court and is not just skimmed over.

We are also trying something different in court; we are putting the problem cases at the end of the calendar and placing those clients that are leading by example at the beginning of the calendar. This allows us to spend the time necessary with those clients that need the extra attention and acts as an incentive to those that are doing well. Being praised in front of a full courtroom gives them a confidence boost and they are also able to leave court earlier. Focusing more on the positive things the clients are doing, while providing those who are not doing well with appropriate sanctions swiftly, has become a winning combination for us. I can say that I haven't had a single juvenile miss curfew in months, most of my clients have perfect attendance for this school year so far, most make it through the program never missing a group session or urinalysis and I have seen an overall improvement in attitude.

This change in client attitude came with a change in the drug court team's approach, so it is my opinion and experience that it is the quality of the court visits not the quantity that has the most impact on the success of a juvenile client.

IDAHO

Tammy Adkins
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Our Phase I participants come to court weekly; Phase II participants come 3 times per month; Phase III participants come 2 times per month; and Phase IV participants come 1 time per month. I think this is a very important part of the program. The only statistics we have are the questionnaires our juveniles and parents fill out on a quarterly basis for our reviews and about 90 to 95% of the parents and juveniles feel that meeting with the Judge and the interaction with the Judge is important and is one of the motivators for them to remain clean and sober.

Christal Bossert
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For Mini-Cassia Juvenile Drug Court, meetings are held as follows:

- Phase 1 1 time per week
- Phase 2 1 time every two weeks
- Phase 3 1 time every three weeks
- Phase 4 1 time every three to four weeks.

Karen Carlson
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In Bonneville County, Phase I participants attend court weekly; Phase II participants attend three times a month; Phase III participants attend twice a month; and Phase IV participants attend once a month. If a young person needs a sanction and it is not their normally scheduled week, we ask them to come to court that week anyway. On months that we have an 'extra' week, we do a family activity with the drug court team during that normal court time. We do things such as a BBQ, bowling or playing pool, or other appropriate activities. We definitely see the importance of regular attendance - just as important for the incentives as for any sanctions. I believe our participants would agree.

Matt English
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Our hearing schedule is as follows:

- Phase one: 1 time every week (Wed.)
- Phase two: 2 times every month (Every other Wed.)
- Phase three: 1 time every month (Every 4th Wed.)

Shawn L. Hill
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Participants are required to attend as follows:

- Phase 1: attend every week
- Phase 2 - the first three Wednesdays of the month
- Phase 3 - the first and third Wednesday of the month; and
- Phase 4 - the first Wednesday of the month.

Kristina Palmer
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I think the more often they appear, the more meaningful it is and the more they relate their consequences or incentives with their behavior. Our Phase 1 clients come weekly, our Phase 2 clients come every other week, and our Phase 3 clients come once per month, which is typically after 6-7 months in the program and being compliant and sober.

MARYLAND

Judge Kathleen Gallogly Cox
Juvenile Drug Court
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Our model requires bi-weekly reviews of juveniles in the first two of the four phases of our program, and that decreases to monthly reviews in the last two phases. We use increased reviews in the latter two phases as a sanction, at times. And we always have the option of immediate review (basically next day) of any particularly troublesome behavior.

Bi-weekly seems to work fine in the early phases, when our other program contacts are quite frequent. With docket size, the court reviews last a couple hours on average, so we would be reluctant to increase those contacts, as I think we would have more difficulty ensuring parent participation.

MINNESOTA

Sara Rohde
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In Ramsey County (St. Paul, MN) we have weekly drug court hearings during Phase I. Participants in Phase 2 come every other week, and participants in Phase 3 come once a month.

I am not aware of any research about the impact of the frequency of hearings.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Ray Bilodeau
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In New Hampshire we have 6 Juvenile Drug Courts running. We are presently funding a 5 year study on the effectiveness of the Juvenile Drug Courts through the NH Center for Public Policies Studies. The study was part of the Robert Wood Johnson Reclaiming Futures Project. The Center has published a few of the preliminary finding on their web site at www.nhpolicy.org.

We do not have definitive or empirical data to date. Some observations we have found are that when we do have to skip a week due to scheduling verses a youth who has earned a week or two off of Court, we have seen a number of "slips" in behavior among the youths. What we have tried to do to avoid this is when we do have to cancel court due to scheduling problems, we organize an activity for the youths and/or their families to be involved in. It seems the youths get use to reporting to the Court on how well they have been doing during the week and I believe they miss the connection of talking with the Judge. We have done activities, such as having the youths plan and hold a dinner for the parents. They have held discussion meetings about community service projects or discussion groups around presentations that they were required to attend.

NORTH DAKOTA

Marilyn Moe
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We have not done a study on the frequency of court appearances. In the summertime our courts will go every other week and on off weeks they will have some physical activity such as volleyball, softball, or some other organized activity with the participants. This is often done with all the team members. They have not seen this negatively impact the success of the participants. If anything, it has formed more of a bond with the kids and the team members.

When the courts have gone without a weekly session and with no activity in between, they have noticed that the kids become uninterested and start to slide. Of course, as they progress through their Paths they are seen less and less. If they slip during that week, they are brought back in weekly.

OTHER

Shannon M. Carey, Ph.D.
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I don't know of any research that specifically links the frequency of hearings with outcomes (and I'm interested if you got any information on this!). NPC has not yet completed a large number of juvenile drug court evaluations (although we are in the midst of several - approximately 9 courts in Maryland and Indiana). In the three we have completed so far, the court that had the most positive outcomes (the youths were "re-arrested" less than half as often as the comparison group) had court sessions weekly in Phase 1 (which lasted about 3 months on average) and then once every two weeks in Phase 2 (once every 3 weeks)

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in Phase 3 and once every 4 weeks in Phase 4).

We welcome any additional information and/or perspective readers may have on this topic.

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