

DOSAGE PRO_xBATION:

Continuous Quality Improvement and Coaching Guide

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Dosage Probation: Continuous Quality Improvement and Coaching Guide

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The National Institute of Corrections, in partnership with the Center for Effective Public Policy, has developed this resource to highlight the innovative concept of dosage probation and to share the successes, challenges, and lessons learned. This model of community supervision is not yet fully tested.

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Introduction

Continuous quality improvement (CQI) processes provide a succession of professional development opportunities that involve tailored feedback and training, designed to improve the use of specific skills over time and ensure the efficacy of related services and practices. It is an approach that relies on a partnership, rather than a hierarchy, between two people: the person engaged in developing their professional skills and the person conducting the CQI process (also known as the “coach”).

CQI and QA

The term “continuous quality improvement” is often used interchangeably with “quality assurance”; however, the two activities are different. Quality assurance (QA) is an auditing process that seeks to identify and correct departures from policy or protocol. It answers the question “Was the activity done?” CQI, on the other hand, answers the question “Was the activity done well?”

The primary goals of the CQI process include:

1. **creating and nurturing an environment** characterized by an ongoing desire to learn and improve,
2. **identifying practices** that are working well and those in need of attention, and
3. **determining the specific enhancements** that are required to support improvements in the quality of service delivery and in outcomes.

The development of a CQI plan is necessary to ensure the effective implementation of the dosage probation model. Research and practice show that while classroom-based training introduces essential knowledge and skills, it is insufficient for ensuring skills are transferred to day-to-day work, performed with accuracy, and improved over time.¹ A department-specific CQI plan will provide dosage probation officers with ongoing feedback to improve their knowledge, skills, competencies, and confidence in using evidence-based practices in general and in implementing dosage probation in particular, thus contributing to the department’s risk reduction goals.

This guide describes the essential components of a department-specific dosage probation CQI plan.²

¹ See, for example: Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K. A., Friedman, R. M., & Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation research: A synthesis of the literature* (FMHI Publication #231). National Implementation Research Network. <https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/sites/nirn.fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/NIRN-MonographFull-01-2005.pdf>; Sholomskas, D. E., Syracuse-Siewert, G., Rounsaville, B. J., Ball, S. A., Nuro, K. F., & Carroll, K. M. (2005). We don’t train in vain: A dissemination trial of three strategies of training clinicians in cognitive-behavioral therapy. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 73(1), 106–115. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.73.1.106>.

² This guide was developed based on the [Continuous Quality Improvement](#) coaching packet developed by Mark Carey for the Center for Effective Public Policy.

Essential Skills of the Dosage Probation Officer

A dosage probation CQI plan is built around and ensures that dosage probation officers demonstrate a **high degree of competency** in each of the following **essential skills**:

1. Make clear that the goal of dosage probation is to help probationers succeed.
2. Provide probationers with choices rather than directing their actions.
3. Engage in nonjudgmental discussion.
4. Focus on probationers' behavior (rather than on their history or personality).
5. Use conversational dialogue and tone.
6. Listen more, talk less.
7. Strictly adhere to assessment scoring guidelines and techniques.
8. Share assessment results with probationers.
9. Identify the driver (the criminogenic need most likely driving the others).
10. Engage probationers in the case planning process.
11. Develop SMART case plans that address probationers' most influential criminogenic needs.
12. Limit case plan goals to the most significant criminogenic and stabilization needs.
13. Identify specific activities that address case plan goals and that count toward dosage.
14. Build upon probationers' strengths when developing case plans.
15. Address responsivity needs in case plans.
16. Review and update case plans frequently.
17. Structure appointments intentionally.
18. Conduct appointments of at least 30 minutes.
19. Focus the majority of appointment time on skill building associated with assessed criminogenic needs.
20. Teach concrete skills.
21. Demonstrate skills for probationers.
22. Use structured tools (worksheets, journals, lesson plans) to teach skills.
23. Have probationers practice skills; provide feedback.
24. Provide appropriate take-home assignments.
25. Effectively review previous take-home assignments.
26. Increase the difficulty of skill practice over time.
27. Identify prosocial attitudes and behaviors.
28. Effectively respond to prosocial attitudes and behaviors through the use of affirmations and rewards.
29. Identify harmful attitudes and behaviors.
30. Effectively respond to harmful attitudes and behaviors through the use of sanctions and by linking harmful choices to goals.

Recruiting and Selecting Coaches

The selection of effective coaches is key to ensuring that the department is able to support staff in their use of core skills and their implementation of dosage probation. As coaching relies on providing constructive feedback and support, it is only as valuable as the coach's level of expertise *and* collaborative partnership with their coachee. Coaches can be supervisors, peers, or both. They should be knowledgeable and skilled in dosage probation practices. They should be available to perform the coaching role and be accessible to staff. In addition, they should possess the following traits:

- **approachable**, supportive, encouraging, patient;
- **organized**;
- **honest**, fair, realistic;
- **nonjudgmental**, targeting feedback toward behavior rather than the person;
- **responsive** to others' learning styles, flexible, guiding rather than telling;
- **invested** in others' success, solution-oriented; and
- **committed** to looking for strengths and opportunities to praise others.

There are three CQI methods that coaches can use to ascertain whether and how well dosage probation officers are using the essential skills listed above and implementing dosage

probation: case file reviews, direct observations, and audio or video recording reviews. A department may use one or more of these CQI methods over time.

CQI Tools

Many CQI tools are used throughout the country. Some are highly specialized and examine a specific skill area (such as motivational interviewing) while others are developed locally, in consideration of departmental mission, needs, staff skill level, available resources, and so on. As such, there is no “right tool.” Each department will have to determine the extent to which they want to explore tools available on the open market (both public domain and proprietary) or develop their own in-house tools.

In order to achieve accurate and consistent reviews and observations across cases, appointments, and coaches, each CQI method must have an accompanying tool consisting of a predetermined set of questions or items to be considered, as well as a scoring scale used to determine the presence or absence of, or the level of skill related to, specific conditions. Regardless of the tool, it should be focused, short, and easy to administer.

Case File Reviews

The purpose of reviewing case files is to monitor whether or not certain dosage probation policies or procedures—for example, those around risk assessment, case planning and management, supervision strategies, and counting dosage—are being applied to individual cases. Case auditing is typically accomplished through the use of case file checklists that consider questions such as the following:

- Do case plans address the probationer’s **most significant criminogenic and stabilization needs**?
- Do case plan goals and activities **reflect appropriate dosage and intensity** given the probationer’s risk level?
- Are **case plans updated** as per departmental policy?
- Are **dosage hours counted** according to the department’s *Counting Dosage Manual*?

See Appendix A for a sample Dosage Probation Case File Review Checklist.

While case audits offer an important opportunity to determine whether dosage probation officers are complying with policies and procedures, file reviews are inherently limited as they do not provide for a qualitative review of activities. For example, a CQI coach may determine through a case file review that a dosage probation officer addressed a priority criminogenic need area and practiced with the probationer skills to help address the need; however, the CQI coach will not be able to determine the quality of these activities without observation.

Direct Observations

Direct observations provide real-time information about the quality of dosage probation officers' interactions with probationers; how well they use specific skills related to the core correctional practices (building a professional alliance, effective case planning and management, engaging in skill practice to address the most influential criminogenic needs, and appropriately using rewards and responses to noncompliance); and whether they are adopting the policies and practices of dosage probation. Direct observations can be conducted with the CQI coach sitting in the same room as the dosage probation officer and the probationer, or they can be conducted in a separate room with a viewing window. The coach uses an observation form to guide their work and record what they learn. For example, the coach might observe:

- **how much time** the dosage probation officer spends on skill building as opposed to check-ins,
- **how accurately** they teach skills,
- **how effectively** they conduct skill practice, and
- **whether they explain** the take-home assignment to the probationer.

See Appendix B for a sample Dosage Probation Observation Coaching Form.

Audio or Video Recording Reviews³

Like direct observations, audio or video recordings provide insight into the quality of dosage probation officer's interactions with probationers, use of essential skills, and adoption of dosage probation policies and practices. However, unlike direct observations, audio or video recording reviews typically do not relay to the coach a full sense of body language and relationship dynamics between the dosage probation officer and probationer either because the recordings contain only voices or because camera angles are awkward. Audio/video recordings are often easier to coordinate than in-person observations and they may be less intrusive—for both the dosage probation officer and the probationer. Reviews can be guided by the same type of coaching form used for direct observations.

³ Departments are encouraged to verify that audio and/or video recordings of appointments are permitted.

Developing CQI Policies

To ensure high-fidelity implementation of the dosage probation model, departments should develop and put into writing policies and practices to guide CQI activities, for example, decisions around who will serve as CQI coaches, what skills and abilities coaches should focus on, and what documentation should be used to ensure consistency in reviewing practices. The following are some additional questions to consider:

Frequency of CQI Activities

It is important to consider the skill level of dosage probation officers when determining the frequency of CQI activities. Dosage probation officers who are still becoming familiar with and working toward proficiency in the use of the essential skills will require more frequent CQI activities and coaching until they begin to achieve higher degrees of competency. The higher the degree of competency, the less often CQI activities and coaching are needed. For dosage probation officers who are recognized as having mastered these skills, CQI activities and coaching should focus on maintaining proficiency.

- **How often** should CQI activities take place?
- **How many** case files, observations, or audio or video recordings should be included in a review?
- **How are case files, observations, or audio or video recordings chosen** for review? Are they chosen on a random basis or by some other method, and by whom?
- **Should the focus initially be on skills that are used more routinely/frequently**, with more advanced skills considered over time?
- **What benchmarks**, or targets, should be set for activities considered in case file reviews?
- **How should coaching sessions change** to reflect the dosage probation officer's growth? For example, with dosage probation officers who are still becoming familiar with the essential skills, should coaches focus initially on *whether* they're using the skills and then, over time, offer more detailed feedback about *how well* they're using the skills?
- **How soon after** the CQI activity should coaching take place?
- Will coaching interactions be **part of the dosage probation officer's performance review**?
- **What do coaches do with the information they gather** as they observe coachees? Do they collect and/or tabulate this information? Do they share it with supervisors? Do they share it with the dosage probation implementation coordinator, should one be assigned? Is the information used to develop ongoing coaching and training support for dosage probation officers?

Enhancing Staff Skills

Commitment to continual learning is a hallmark of the CQI process. Ongoing coaching and training support are critical to ensuring dosage probation officers are using essential risk reduction skills accurately and consistently over time—avoiding “drift” from how the skills are intended to be used—and adhering to the principles and practices of dosage probation. Two methods for ensuring dosage probation officers are continually advancing their skills include booster sessions and learning teams.

Booster sessions are typically led by one or more coaches for a small or large group of dosage probation officers. The purpose of these sessions is to provide dosage probation officers with ongoing opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills in the areas that they and their coach have identified for improvement. Sessions—which might last a whole day, a half day, or an hour every month—are typically focused on assisting participating staff with one or two common skill areas. For example, a booster session might address what does and does not count toward dosage and how to accurately calculate dosage hours; it might focus on assessing behavioral indicators; or it might clarify the purpose and use of a particular cognitive-behavioral tool. Sessions should be based on the skill level of dosage probation officers, with separate sessions held for those beginning to implement skills, experienced staff, and highly proficient staff.

Learning teams may be more informal, with small groups meeting for one to two hours to practice skills, explore cognitive-behavioral tools, share successes, and troubleshoot challenges.

The following are some questions to consider when planning booster sessions and learning teams:

1. **What policies or practices need to be put in place** to ensure a collaborative learning environment, where everyone is free to ask questions and learn from their mistakes (e.g., agreeing on group norms)?
2. **Will attendance be voluntary or mandatory**, and for whom?
3. **How will topics be selected?**
4. **Who will lead booster sessions** (e.g., a coach, supervisor, dosage probation officer who has attained proficiency status)? Will there be a co-lead?
5. **Will learning teams be structured**—led by a coach, supervisor, or peer—or informal?
6. **How often should sessions be held** (e.g., as training needs arise, according to staff’s skill level, depending on workload assignments, monthly, bimonthly)?

Supporting Coaches

Developing strategies for ensuring an effective coaching process is paramount to the success of CQI activities. Coaches must be provided with ongoing training so that they are able to develop both their technical skills and their coaching skills. Not only is it important for them to be highly skilled in the delivery of dosage probation practices but also in the delivery of feedback such that it increases the coachee's reflection, ownership, reception of areas of strength and improvement, and motivation to strive toward proficiency. The following questions should be considered when establishing CQI processes for coaches:

- **Who will coach the coaches** to ensure they remain proficient in their technical skills and continually work to enhance their coaching skills? What does this process look like? Does it include audio or video recordings or direct observations? Booster sessions? Learning teams?
- **Who will monitor the coaches** to ensure they are regularly meeting with their coachees and offering constructive feedback? How will “constructive feedback” be measured (e.g., through an assessment tool, staff survey)?
- **What policies and procedures need to be put in place** to ensure consistency in coaching across coaches? For example, will coaches be required to follow a certain feedback session structure?

Appendix A: Dosage Probation Case File Review Checklist

Measure	TARGET: Percentage of Cases in Which Activity is Applied ⁴	RATING: 5 = On Target 4 = Largely on Target 3 = Partially on Target 2 = Largely Not on Target 1 = Not on Target
Intake/Assessment		
Risk/needs assessment completed	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Responsivity factors identified	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Strengths identified	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Triggers identified	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Case Plan and Case Management		
Case plan completed	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Case plan addresses most influential criminogenic needs	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Case plan includes trigger(s) and relapse plan	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Case plan is SMART	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Case plan developed with probationer input	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Case plan includes probationer signature	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Interventions match risk, need, and responsivity factors	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Interventions sequenced properly, with emphasis on the driver and other most influential criminogenic needs	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Case plan reflects appropriate dosage/intensity of intervention	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Dosage Tracking Form completed at each appointment	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Behavioral indicators assessed according to policy	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Case notes reflect periodic structured meetings with probationer to discuss progress with behavior change and dosage hours	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Case notes reflect staff's use of strength-based approach	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Case plan updated every 90 days	X%	1 2 3 4 5

⁴ Targets will reflect departmental policy.

Measure	TARGET: Percentage of Cases in Which Activity is Applied ⁴	RATING: 5 = On Target 4 = Largely on Target 3 = Partially on Target 2 = Largely Not on Target 1 = Not on Target
Supervision Strategies		
Case notes indicate frequent use of behavioral techniques (e.g., modeling, use of practice sessions, skill building, take-home assignments) linked to most influential criminogenic needs	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Case notes indicate frequent use of intervention tools (e.g., cognitive worksheets) that aid in skill development	X%	
Case notes indicate program learnings are reinforced in one-on-one appointments	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Incentives and rewards appropriately used according to policy	X%	1 2 3 4 5
Disincentives and sanctions appropriately used according to policy	X%	1 2 3 4 5

COMMENTS
Summary of areas mastered:
Summary of areas in need of improvement:
Professional development plan:

Appendix B: Dosage Probation Observation Coaching Form

Dosage Probation Officer Name:	Review Date: Review Type: <input type="checkbox"/> Recording <input type="checkbox"/> Direct Observation
Probationer Name:	Current Risk Level:
Criminogenic Needs (Circle the Driver):	
Responsivity Factors:	
Topics Discussed During Appointment (Appointment Activities): Risk Reduction Tools Used:	Appointment Length:
Coach's Name & Signature:	
Dosage Probation Officer's Signature:	

ESSENTIAL SKILLS	RATING	COMMENTS
	5 = Advanced 4 = Proficient 3 = Intermediate 2 = Basic 1 = Needs Improvement N/A	
1. Makes clear that the goal of dosage probation is to help the probationer succeed		
2. Provides the probationer with choices rather than directing their actions		
3. Engages in nonjudgmental discussion		
4. Focuses on the probationer’s behavior (rather than on their history or personality)		
5. Uses conversational dialogue and tone		
6. Listens more, talks less		
7. Engages the probationer in developing or updating the case plan		
8. Develops or refers to a SMART case plan that addresses the probationer’s five most influential criminogenic needs		
9. Structures the appointment intentionally		
10. Conducts an appointment of at least 30 minutes		
11. Focuses on the driver or another one of the five most influential needs		
12. Focuses the majority of appointment time on skill building associated with an assessed criminogenic need		
13. Engages in specific activities that address a case plan goal and that count toward dosage		

ESSENTIAL SKILLS	RATING	COMMENTS
	5 = Advanced 4 = Proficient 3 = Intermediate 2 = Basic 1 = Needs Improvement N/A	
14. Teaches a concrete skill		
15. Demonstrates the skill for the probationer		
16. Uses structured tools (worksheets, journals, lesson plans) to teach the skill		
17. Has the probationer practice the skill; provides feedback		
18. Builds upon the probationer's strengths		
19. Addresses responsivity needs		
20. Provides an appropriate take-home assignment		
21. Effectively reviews the previous take-home assignment		
22. Identifies prosocial attitudes and behaviors		
23. Effectively responds to prosocial attitudes and behaviors through the use of affirmations and rewards		
24. Identifies harmful attitudes and behaviors		
25. Effectively responds to harmful attitudes and behaviors the use of sanctions and by linking harmful choices to goals		
Average Rating: ⁵		

⁵ Computed by adding all scores and dividing by number of scored items (N/As not counted)

Areas of Strength

Areas for Training or Growth