
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Chris Roebuck
Chief Statistician
NHS Digital
(by email)

11 March 2020

Dear Chris

ANNUAL MENTAL HEALTH ACT STATISTICS, ENGLAND

As you are aware, we have recently conducted our review of the [Mental Health Act Statistics – Annual Figures](#), produced by NHS Digital, against the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). Mental health awareness has grown considerably in recent years, as has the need to better understand the level of support and quality of services being provided to those most at need. An [independent review of the Mental Health Act 1983](#) was commissioned by the Government for 2018, examining legislation, how the Act is used and how its practices can be improved. Much of the focus of the review was on the quality of existing data concerning the Mental Health Act and the need for greater harmonisation of multiple data sets – providing a clearer picture to policymakers, local decision-makers and the public of how the Act is used and in what context.

I can confirm that the Mental Health Act statistics can remain designated as National Statistics. In reviewing these statistics, we found a number of good examples of relevance to users, clarity and insight and innovation and improvement. These good examples include:

- The producer team has been transparent regarding the level of data returns from providers of care under the Mental Health Act, whilst acknowledging that completeness of returns for the Mental Health Services Data Set (MHSDS) has been an issue following the transition to the new data collection series. The new data collection series re-uses operational data from service providers, with the previous collection an aggregate data series. The team has been clear that as a result, comparisons of detention rates between the two separate data collection series are not valid at a national level.
- The publication is written in a simple and informative manner. The accompanying figures are clear and the inclusion of more-detailed breakdowns of patients detained under the Mental Health Act by gender, age and ethnicity allow for greater insight.
- Providing an easy-read version of the full publication demonstrates that the producer team has considered the needs of a wide range of users.
- The presentation of the statistics within the [Mental Health Data Hub](#) allows users to refine the data based on individual requirements, allowing the statistical bulletin to be presented in a more condensed format.

We have identified some areas where improvements could be made to ensure that the highest standards of National Statistics continue to be met:

- The producer team has set out a series of plans to improve the statistics. This includes working collaboratively with national bodies to develop a comprehensive data quality improvement plan for the Mental Health Services Data Set, and the establishment of a dedicated data quality team – responsible for identifying and communicating with providers

who have either failed to submit or have submitted largely varying data on a month to month basis. The team has also developed specific plans to improve Mental Health Act data within the wider data set. We encourage the team to review the plans on a regular basis to understand their effectiveness, and to amend their plans where necessary.

- With the producer team set to implement the above changes, we recommend the team publish its plans so that users are informed of future developments. Doing so will ensure that the team maintains transparency regarding the improvements to the statistics that the users can expect to see.
- We further encourage the team to integrate statistics on discharge rates following detentions under the Mental Health Act. We understand that this analysis is possible, but that the most appropriate method needs to be determined. We recommend the team works towards identifying the best approach to producing these figures, in line with the findings of the independent review.

We appreciate the team's cooperation throughout the review process and welcome the plans that it has set out. We also encourage the team to maintain its close working ties with Department for Health and Social Care in supporting the recommendations of the independent review of the Mental Health Act.

Our Health and Social Care team will continue to engage with you and your team in the coming months to follow up on areas that have been highlighted for improvement.

I am copying this letter to Ramesh Notra (Principal Information Analyst, Community and Mental Health Statistics Team, NHS Digital).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Pont', with a horizontal line underneath.

Mark Pont

Assessment Programme Lead