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abstract

**Citation:**

Vanderplasschen, W. & De Maeyer, J. (2007). The practice of case management for substance abusers: what's in a name? *Adiktologie* (7)4, 459-469.

# The practice of case management for substance abusers: what's in a name?



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Despite the widespread application and popularity of case management, this intervention is not unanimously defined. Case management is characterized most accurately by its five basic functions: assessment, planning, linking, advocacy, and monitoring. These functions can be categorized in a cyclical process, preceded by a case finding and engagement-phase and followed by a disengagement-phase. As it is often unclear what this intervention entails, we explore what case managers' tasks may imply in practice, based on a case study. A wide variety of case management activities (case finding and engagement) already take place before a client has actually become part of such a program. The assessment phase can be defined as a comprehensive inventory of clients' strengths and weaknesses with a clear focus on community resources. Based on this assessment, goals are identified in all relevant life domains and a service plan is designed to address these problems and needs efficiently. Linkage is the core activity of case managers and can be defined as introducing persons to appropriate community resources and agencies according to their needs. Advocacy is speaking out on behalf of clients, in case agreements, obligations or rights are denied. Monitoring clients' progress and adjusting service plans as needed is the last core function of case managers, and leads to reiteration of previous phases of the whole process or to disengagement. Ultimately, clients themselves play a central role in the case management process and will be the ones – in consultation with the case manager – to decide on the (next) steps to be taken.

**Key words:** case management – substance abuse – practice – case study

Received: 4 September 2007

Translation: Mgr. Jindřich Bayer, Mgr. Blanka Korčíšová