

# core news

## Lessons from America



**Incentivised outcomes monitoring may be the shape of things to come in the psychological therapies. This is the direction of travel in the US, and it could be standard practice in the UK in as little as five years' time. The good news is that it is likely to drive up performance across the board, to the benefit of clients, funders, and the profession.**

Jeb Brown, Director of the Center for Clinical Informatics in Salt Lake City, Utah, specialises in assisting US healthcare organisations to implement outcome-informed care. As a corporate clinical director of one of the big health insurance companies, Jeb realised that measuring outcomes would make the business more competitive and started working on the methodology.

'We have a great deal of data to prove that clinician performance drives everything in terms of both outcome and cost of care', says Jeb. 'Decades of research have shown that both psychotherapy and medication are effective for a variety of mental health conditions – and that different modalities of psychotherapy and different medications produce similar results. We have known for 10 years that the clinician is more important than the technique in terms of psychotherapy outcomes. Two recent analyses demonstrate more surprising results: first, that the prescribing clinician is at least as important as the drug in pharmacotherapy outcomes, and second that the psychotherapist affects the impact of medication even in combination treatment!'

'The findings run counter to the medical model, which assumes that

outcome depends on correct diagnosis and applying the correct treatment', says Jeb. 'Conventional meta-analyses have masked clinician effects by assuming that they do not exist. When we re-analysed National Institute for Mental Health data using hierarchical linear modelling, which specifies the clinician as a possible source of variance, it confirmed findings from managed care data showing that clinicians are the primary source of variance in client outcomes'.

'A growing body of research over the past decade suggests that routine measurement of outcomes leads to improved outcomes, particularly for those patients most at risk of treatment failure', says Jeb. 'Once you understand that variability in psychological therapy outcomes is due primarily to the clinician, not the treatment, there is a real ethical responsibility to monitor outcomes on a routine basis, aside from financial considerations'.

'Fear of measurement is destroying the profession', says Jeb. 'Our work suggests that incentivising outcome monitoring will help to create a culture of outcome measurement and that this in turn will promote truly effective psychotherapy and drive costs down'.

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### Thriving in a cold climate



**Outcome measurement will be central to the survival of psychological**

**therapy services in an increasingly cost-aware climate, says Richard Evans, CORE System Trustee and Director of the Artemis Trust.**

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# Focusing on feedback

With over 20 sites and 1600 users, and with data entry in excess of 30,000 clients, CORE Net has been put through its paces in 2008. Feedback is at the heart of CORE IMS. CORE Net and CORE PC are predicated on the use of feedback to enhance performance within services. Likewise, all feedback on the use of CORE products is warmly welcomed. Here we present a sample of feedback from some CORE Net users, along with our response to requests for further development of the system.

## Management enthusiasm



Claire McMillan was new to outcome measurement when she joined the staff counselling team at Kingston

Hospital NHS Trust four months ago, though she had 13 years of therapy experience behind her. Claire found it easy to use CORE Net right from the start because of the support she

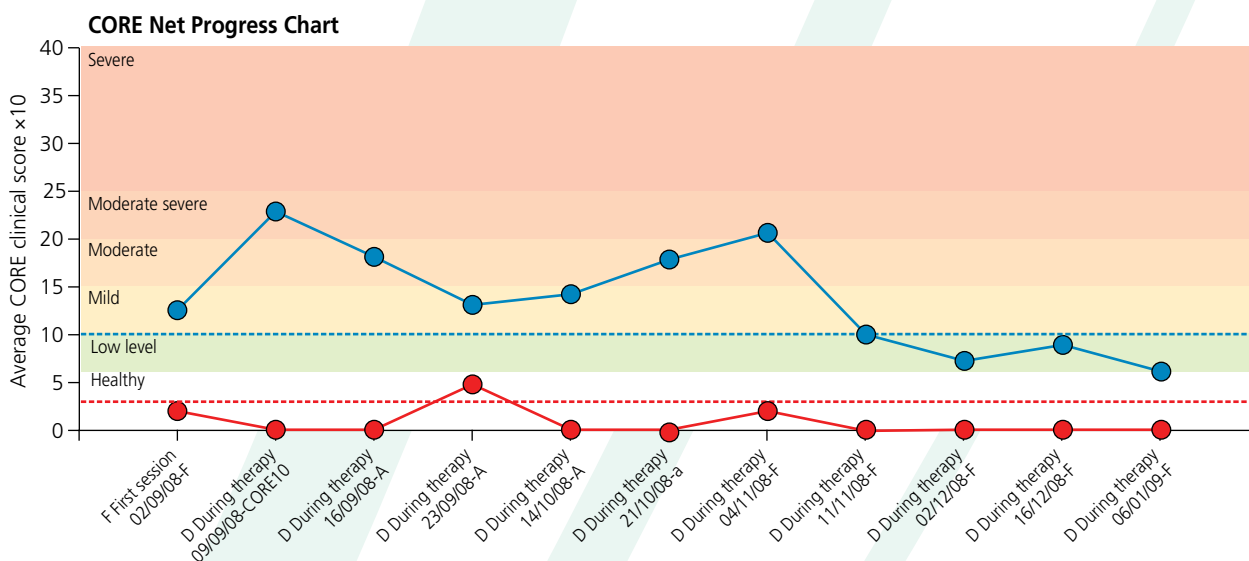
received from her manager.

'I believe that clients' reactions to CORE Net depend on how it is framed', says Claire. 'My manager, who I respect, was very enthusiastic so I thought, "Well, I'll give it a go". I made no judgement until I had used it with clients', says Claire. 'I presented it as if it was the most normal thing in the world, and the result is that I have not had a single objection from any client. Equally, because

my manager uses a completely transparent process, anyone in the team can look not just at our own effectiveness but anybody else's on the team, including our manager's. This encourages a very open and cooperative atmosphere'.

## A therapeutic document

'One feature I really like about CORE Net is the upfront way that risk is addressed', says Claire. 'Because

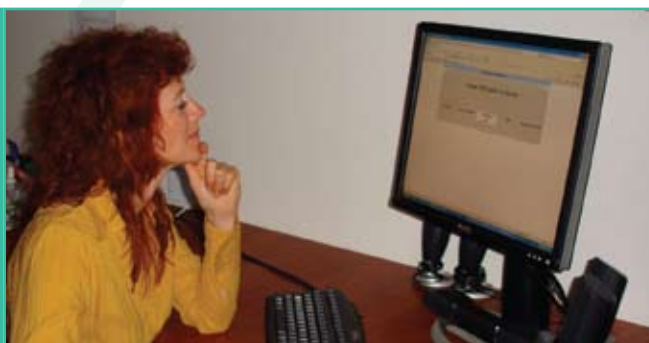


Ms C presented with work-based issues but it soon became clear that her personal life was also a source of great stress. During therapy she began to respond well, but then a change of job increased her anxiety again and this was coupled with an argument with her partner. It was useful at this stage to show her the chart and have a discussion around the roller coaster nature of the curve. The outcome was steady improvement. The graph dropped consistently until it was below cut off. The slight rise in her CORE score at the penultimate session reflects her decision to end her relationship. It is testament to her recovery process that this was a temporary rise; at the last appointment she was back to where she was despite having taken this difficult decision.

**'I think of the CORE outcome measure as a therapeutic document.**

**Using CORE Net adds a ritual to the session, and there is an expectation of improvement in the client'**

*Claire McMillan,  
Kingston Hospital NHS Trust*



the risk questions are there I have no difficulty saying, "Okay, let's talk about this. You had thoughts about harming yourself. Have you made any plans?"

'I think of the CORE outcome measure as a therapeutic document', says Claire. 'Using CORE Net adds a ritual to the session, and right from the start I say, "This is where you are and this is where you're aiming for. This is what we are looking to achieve". So there is an expectation of improvement in the client'.

'The counsellors in our service all have completely different backgrounds. I find that interesting because it means we are measuring quality relatively speaking. CORE Net for me is as much a qualitative as a quantitative tool. Regardless of our therapeutic orientation, our work is assessed in the same way'.

## Direct online data entry



Keith Hagenbach of Counselling Team Ltd, a community-based psychological therapy service in Kent, sees in

excess of 20 clients a week. Keith's early concerns about the introduction of CORE Net into the service soon dissipated, and he quickly began to appreciate the advantages of instant feedback for clients through inputting data directly online.

'At first I was concerned about change for its own sake', says Keith. 'I understood the process we had been using for many years, measuring at the beginning and end of therapy, and instinctively felt a resistance to changing it'.

'I now realise that having to look at the paper copy and quickly evaluate it is less convenient than doing it directly online', says Keith.

**'I have not had any resistance to CORE Net on the part of clients at all. As a rule, clients find it helpful'**

*Keith Hagenbach, Counselling Team Ltd.*



## Setting a precedent in the personal injury market

Therapists at the Human Givens Practice Group, a private psychotherapy service orientated towards the personal injury market, have been using CORE Net for therapy and supervision for the past 18 months. Managing Director, Wendy Amey, finds

that CORE Net saves time in assessment, assists in her practice and provides her with a powerful method of promoting her business.

'CORE Net saves time at assessment because I gather a huge amount of information within a matter of minutes', says Wendy. 'Clients find it easy', she continues. 'It gives them a focus. I also obtain information that people may not express verbally, but they will tick a box, which gives an opening to explore their concerns'.

'Using CORE Net at every therapy session helps to identify patterns and trends. Clients will sometimes come along and say, "I don't think I've made a lot of progress". I will show them their results and they'll say, "Oh my goodness, that's good isn't it?"'

'From a business perspective, CORE Net facilitates the provision of feedback to my referrers', says Wendy. 'With personal injury there are many interested parties: the insurer, the lawyer, often a rehabilitation company, as well as the client, and they all want to know whether our treatment works. Having data that is irrefutable as opposed to saying, "I think we're on track" or "We're getting somewhere", is priceless'.

'The referrers to my service love outcome data and the cost benefit to them that it demonstrates', says Wendy. 'Working with CORE Net is allowing me to set a precedent in the personal injury market by providing accurate and detailed feedback on client progress'.

'My picture had been that the client would be doing all the inputting. Once I discovered that it worked much better for me to do it and, very importantly, that clients were perfectly happy for me to do the mechanical work of entering while they gave me the answers, I felt that the energetic connection with my clients was unbroken. My worries were dispelled. As far as time is concerned it is a very quick process, so my worries about timing were also dispelled', says Keith. 'Online is really smooth and easy'.

## Validating client progress

'Clients are often pleasantly surprised to have independent evidence that they are making progress in the form of the summary chart. This is not me saying how they are doing. This is their experience being reflected to them in a way that is very easily grasped. The process of coming to counselling is being validated because they can see the improvement, and that I really like about it'.

'I have not had any resistance to CORE Net on the part of the clients at all. I cannot think of a single instance. As a rule, clients find it helpful. So it is useful for me and my clients', says Keith. 'It is a part of my work now'.

# Developing CORE Net through feedback



**'Since its inception, the CORE IMS ethos has been a "bottom up" approach', says**

**Tony Jordan, Training and Development Lead at CORE IMS. However, success has brought new challenges. The user experience of CORE Net across services of enormous range and variety has naturally led to a host of requests for further enhancements to the product.**

## Second-generation CORE Net

'We allowed the usage of CORE Net to bed in across a broad range of demonstration sites, and then through active collaboration with end users, started to identify commonly emerging themes to inform how we specify the next generation system', says Tony. 'This led to a comprehensive review of the functionality of CORE Net, and we are now moving towards implementation of a variety of modifications and enhancements. The new version of CORE Net will include enhanced data quality management features and the ability to meaningfully reflect on one's data through user-friendly reporting screens'.

## IAPT-compliant version

'The provision of new funding to help relieve psychological distress through the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme brought psychological therapy into the headlines', says Tony. 'However, we are hearing

from practitioners that the IAPT methodology presents significant challenges in terms of how to capture the amount of information required whilst minimising disruption to actual therapy sessions. Because we are committed to providing practitioner-friendly systems, we have developed an IAPT-compliant version of CORE Net, in which all the usability advantages of CORE Net are available whilst at the same time fully meeting IAPT requirements'.

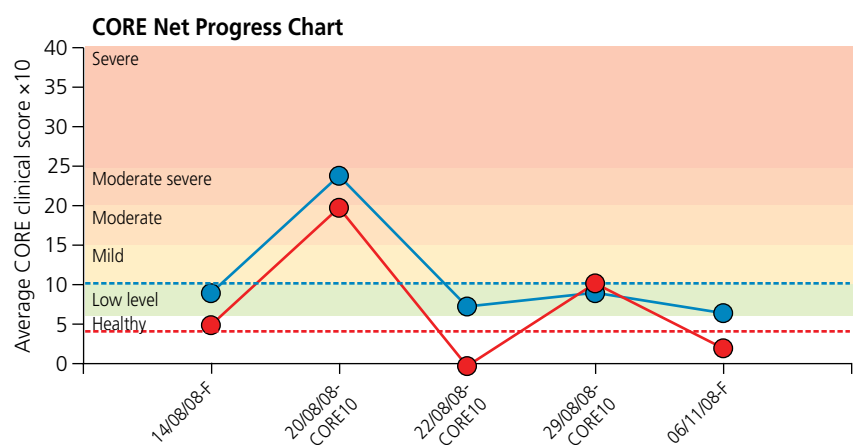
## Training and support

'CORE IMS is far from being just a software company', says Tony. 'The future of outcome measurement and management lies in motivating practitioners to realise the relevance of the methodology and its integration into their clinical practice', he says. 'Because of this we place great emphasis on the provision of training for our customers. There is growing disillusionment about reliance on efficacy studies in randomised clinical

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*Tony Jordan,  
Training and Development  
Lead, CORE IMS*

trials as the only reliable source of evidence. The case for providing robust practice-based evidence has been strongly made by many experts in the field. CORE IMS is committed to training and supporting practitioners to routinely gather such evidence, and we look forward with enthusiasm to the challenges and opportunities ahead'.



Mr R was referred for stress management. His initial scores suggested a very low level of difficulty, but these were not matched by his presentation and demeanour. As he began to open up in discussion of his answers to the various questions, it became clear that Mr R was putting on a brave face that masked far deeper problems. He acknowledged that his scores at the second appointment were a much more honest reflection of his interior world. Facing up to this reality and really engaging with therapy, he made a dramatic improvement by session three. At the fourth session he was able to identify the external event that triggered a minor setback, and then continued to make further progress.



# CORE Net

- Direct online data entry
- Saves time, provides focus
- Widespread client acceptance
- Addresses risk of client self-harm and harm to others
- Validates client progress
- Encourages self-appraisal
- Assists supervision
- Gathers practice-based evidence
- Aids business development
- IAPT-compliant version

**‘CORE Net brings us back to the fundamentals. It informs the therapy and helps to keep it on track. The flags feature provides me with the flexibility to monitor both the caseload of individual therapists and the entire project’**

*Kyle Brooks, Manager and supervisor, Hartlepool Mind*



## Wholehearted acceptance



CORE Net has made a significant contribution to case management and supervision at Hartlepool Mind,

says manager and supervisor, Kyle Brooks.

‘The introduction of CORE Net has been met with wholehearted acceptance by both our counselling team and our clients’, says Kyle. ‘We are getting close to 1000 clients a year through the project, and only two or three have preferred to opt out of filling in the measures since we introduced CORE Net in October 2007’.

## Easy to use

‘Nobody has had any problems using the CORE system. It is simply common sense’ says Kyle. ‘Any therapist can see what needs to be done and see the strength of it immediately. When I introduce CORE Net to new therapists I do not need to explain it in too much detail. It’s not complicated, and that’s another beauty of it. In therapy, language can easily become a bit woolly. CORE Net brings us back to the fundamentals. There it is – it’s a series of statements, of questions; it’s black and white. It informs the therapy and helps to keep it on track. The therapists appreciate that it allows them to inform their own practice by reflecting on their therapy sessions’.

## Powerful tool for management

‘In supervision, therapists bring client cases that they find difficult, or where they feel stuck’, says Kyle. Using CORE Net we can immediately identify if there was earlier progress, what worked in the past and in which session, and go back to that good working method in order to help improve the situation’.

‘From a managerial perspective, I am the biggest convert of all’, says Kyle. ‘The flags feature provides me with the flexibility to monitor both the caseload of individual therapists and the entire project. Having that live information immediately accessible is absolutely incredible. I cannot imagine now working in an organisation without these applications. CORE Net has enhanced our practice. We are all working with the same philosophy. It has helped us to create a collective intelligence’.

## Highlighting key information



A busy counsellor with Hartlepool Mind, Brian Cooper finds that CORE Net has helped him to appraise his work

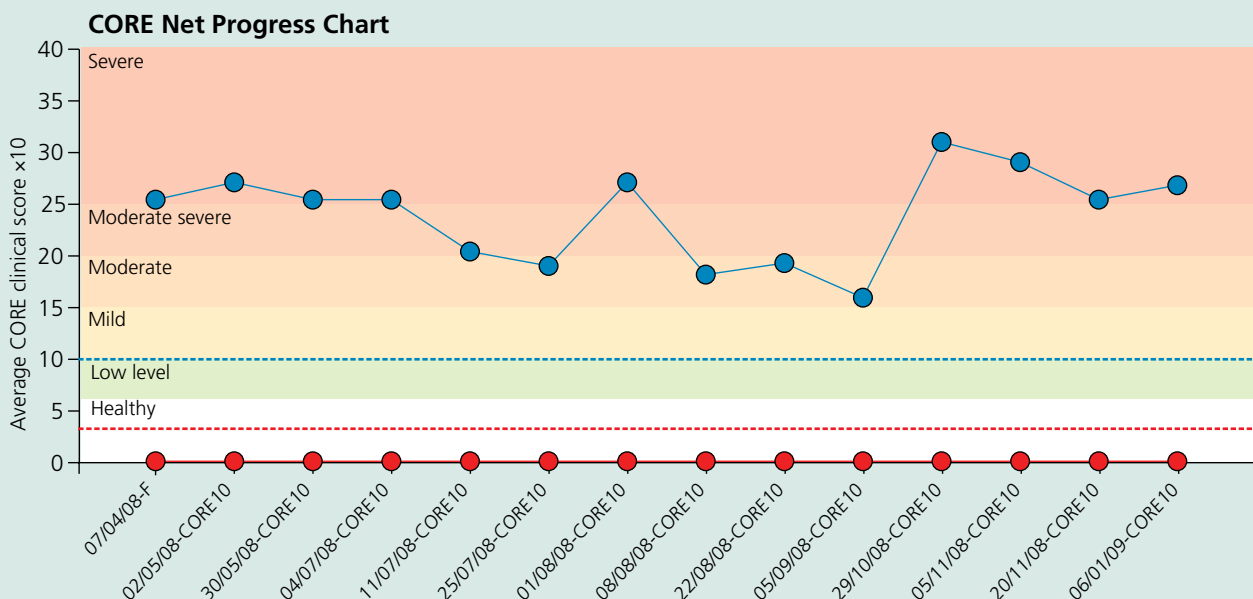
and identify areas in which he may need to seek assistance, as well as assisting him in therapy with clients.

‘As well as helping me to demonstrate whether I am being effective, CORE Net helps me to pull out key information that I may have failed to identify as a concern’, says Brian.

‘Often our clients are in difficult situations and things do not change quickly’, says Brian. ‘CORE Net helps me go back to them and check out whether I have missed something. Sometimes, depending on what comes up on the measures, a whole session might be consolidated around a particular area that is going to help to move them forward’.

## One step ahead

‘Because CORE Net highlights important areas where I may need help, I have been able to get a better focus on my practice’, says Brian. ‘It gives me the opportunity, in effect, to be my own supervisor. I have monthly supervision. My supervisor has access to my data, but because of CORE Net I am always one step ahead of him with respect to any concerns I may have’.



The CORE Net chart can often provide a very accurate representation of the challenges clients face. When Ms T attended for therapy she was suffering from anxiety and depression and having panic attacks. She had recently separated from an abusive partner. During treatment her problems were compounded by the threat of eviction from her rented flat. The CORE progress chart helped her to identify the external triggers that exacerbated her problems and the strategies that helped her make progress. It became an anchor for her when she felt that therapy was no longer helping, because she was reminded of the successes she had had at various stages. Because of the complex social issues involved, her treatment is likely to continue for some time. However, having a reference point that is beyond the opinions of both herself and her therapist is proving invaluable.

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‘Jeb Brown’s experience of healthcare organisations in the US echoes the experience of CORE IMS in the UK’, says Richard. ‘There are large differences between therapists, and routine outcome measurement tends to improve client outcomes’.

‘Effective management has a key role to play in improving cost-effectiveness’ says Richard. ‘Evidence from CORE user services in the UK suggests that outcome measurement in the hands of an effective manager, whether sessional or pre/post, can have the effect of levelling up therapist performance. Yet the fact that service management can impact effectiveness is often overlooked’.

‘Routine progress monitoring can improve effectiveness in other ways’, says Richard. ‘Through enabling therapists to recognise when a client has recovered early in the course of therapy, it can allow the practitioner to terminate therapy and give other clients the opportunity to benefit.

It can also be used to pick up and reduce patient drop-out. And in the hands of an effective manager it can be used to help drive innovations in service delivery’.

‘We are entering a period in which we will need to be increasingly concerned with cost-effectiveness’, says Richard. ‘The Government will be under enormous pressure to cap expenditure and the NHS will have to cut costs. Psychological therapy has always been a marginal service so is likely to be under particular pressure’.

‘In the current climate therapists will have to prove that they are not just effective, but cost-effective’, says Richard. ‘At the same time, services are going to have to get to grips with measuring costs per patient. This will mean demonstrating that the cost per patient recovered compares favourably with the national average, and that service managers have a programme in hand to reduce this cost’.

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