

REMOTE TRIAGE CENTRE

A PRESCRIPTION FOR VIOLENCE?

PROJECT TEAM

Welsh Ambulance Service
South Wales Police
Swansea NHS Trust

POLICE FORCE

South Wales Police

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SUMMARY OF PROJECT
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The City and County of Swansea, the second largest City in Wales with a population of 230,000, has witnessed an increasing concentration in licensed premises within the City Centre, and the City Centre has become a magnet for binge drinking and violent behaviour. Some of the current issues are being addressed by the Safer Swansea Partnership, but the experiences of violence, public order and binge drinking show particular patterns, especially at the weekends and peaking at periods leading up to the Christmas festivities. Such conduct was featured in a recent BBC Programme 'Drunk and Dangerous'.

The main facilities available for the treatment of those suffering from injuries or drink related problems have been at Morriston Hospital which is about 5 miles from the City Centre, with some Accident and Emergency provision at Singleton Hospital, some two miles outside the City Centre.

The Emergency Services responding to injuries have experienced an increased in 999 calls at 12% per annum with Christmas and the New Year showing marked increases. There have been major resource implications for the Ambulance Service, Police and the Hospitals.

In 2002, 20 emergency calls were received to the Kingsway, Swansea alone on the last working day before Christmas and 21 on the New Year's Eve.

The project comprised a concept designed to respond to the continuing problems and which would be supported by partner agencies and was brought to life in a remote triage centre operated from the Kingsway Surgery at the Kingsway, Swansea. Staff from Morriston Accident and Emergency Unit staffed the centre as well as officers from South Wales Police.

On the occasions that the triage centre was operated, a senior member of Ambulance Staff was present in a multi-agency command room situated at Swansea Central Police Station.

CCTV coverage was monitored and Ambulance Staff directed to respond to any incidents of violence.

The triage centre treated the 'walking wounded' on site at the Kingsway and as a result of this, the following outcomes were intended by the project.

- Early intervention clinically to the 'walking wounded'
- Victims of violence available to be spoken to by the Police
- Reduction of ambulance journeys to Morriston Accident and Emergency
- Reduction of Police journeys to Accident and Emergency to speak to victims
- Considerable reduction in Police hours spent on hospital premises and increase in available patrol time
- Reduction in workload on Accident and Emergency staff
- Reduction in threats/assaults on Accident and Emergency staff.

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DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

Background

Assessing the local situation

From July to December 2003, there were 779 crimes in 'H' Division BCU, City and County of Swansea which were assessed as being alcohol related crime of which, 448 were violent crimes. Out of these crimes, the majority were attributable to Swansea City Centre with 244 out of 448 incidents taking place in the City Centre.

In particular, the peaks for crime in the City Centre occurred on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, with the highest levels in November and December.

The Kingsway has still been by far the most violent area within the City Centre, recording up to 112% more crime in 2003 than the next more problematic street.

The data which refers to the month of December means that the probability is that a certain amount of violence which erupts in the City Centre followed Christmas Parties and weekend socialising. The last working Friday prior to Christmas often results in higher than normal levels of crime and disorder in general.

Violent crime in Swansea City Centre is shown as being more likely to be committed between 18.00 hours through to 01.00 hours.

Local Strategy

South Wales Police, and in particular, the Safer Swansea Partnership which includes the City and County of Swansea Local Authority Department, the Mid and West Wales Fire Service, the Welsh Ambulance Service and the local 'H' Division BCU, have attempted to utilise a number of innovative ways of tackling alcohol related violence including door staff schemes, safe drinking, health advice, drugs searches at licensed premises and a Club Watch Scheme.

However, although these schemes involved a multi-agency response, often the problem was addressed by a certain amount of enforcement, including arrest and an increased physical presence by the Police.

The remote triage centre with the motto of 'A Prescription for Violence' was introduced by the Welsh Ambulance Service as a multi-agency response to City Centre alcohol related violence and involved Morrison Hospital Accident and Emergency Unit, Swansea NHS Trust, the Kingsway Surgery, Swansea and South Wales Police.

It was essential that such a scheme utilised the existing infrastructure of partnerships to build upon, and that the triage scheme was targeted at times of greatest need based on empirical data analysis.

Project Aims

The Prescription for Violence campaign was developed to minimise the impact of alcohol related violence on the emergency services enabling them to:-

- a) Treat victims of assaults more expeditiously
- b) Reduction in ambulance attendance at Accident and Emergency
- c) Reduction in Police hours spent travelling to and remaining with victims at Accident and Emergency
- d) Collaborative working with partner agencies
- e) Tackling crime related issues near to the source of the problem
- f) Reducing the number of assaults and threats towards Accident and Emergency staff
- g) Improving agency co-operation and the service towards the public
- h) Releasing ambulance crews for genuine emergency calls
- i) Maintaining Police presence where actually required in the City Centre 'hot spots'

Development of Partnerships

The overall purpose of the Prescription for Violence campaign was to develop already existing partnerships under the umbrella of Safer Swansea Partnership and to tackle issues arising from drink related incidents and crime in a way that would minimise its impact upon service provision and therefore allow all services involved to maximise the quality of such provisions to the public.

The partner agencies involved were:-

- Morrision Hospital Accident and Emergency Unit
- Swansea NHS Trust
- Swansea Local Health Board
- Kingsway Surgery, Swansea
- South Wales Police 'H' Division, Swansea
- St. John Ambulance Wales
- Paramedic Practitioner Pilot, Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

Problem Solving Techniques

Much analysis has been carried out both by the Ambulance Service and South Wales Police, which had the objective of examining the number of 999 calls and alcohol related assaults. The basis of the Police Profile was crime pattern analysis. The resource deployment through the project was based on empirical data identified by the Ambulance Service, and hotspots identified through crime pattern analysis.

Analysis of contributing factors

The consumption of alcohol appears to be the main factor in the ongoing problem of City Centre assaults and public disorder and this is exacerbated by the sheer volume of licensed premises in the Swansea City Centre area. Both victims and assailants in many cases have been seen by the officer in the case to be under the influence of alcohol and two particular hotspots in the City Centre have emerged, namely the Kingsway and Wind Street, which have peak concentrations of licensed premises.

The multi-agency response to these assaults has resulted in the victims making a journey to the Accident and Emergency Unit at Morriston, causing delays in treatment and making victims inaccessible to the Police who may have to wait some considerable time at hospital in order to interview them. In addition, the costs to the Ambulance Service in transporting the 'walking wounded' to hospital and the disruption caused to hospital staff in being inundated with persons who are heavily under the influence of alcohol, are high. Although some security at the hospital is provided by a local security firm, hospital staff have worked under undue pressure caused by threats, intimidation and possible assaults by those who are victims or by persons who have accompanied them there.

This process has resulted in paramedics being unavailable for bona fide emergency calls and has meant that the presence of Police Officers in the City Centre has been depleted because of the need for them to attend the Accident and Emergency Unit at Morriston. The reduction in the physical presence of Police Officers in the City Centre due to this has resulted in the increased likelihood of further assaults taking place.

Problem Solutions

Partnership Approaches

A number of schemes have been run previously in the City Centre to tackle drink related violence and these have involved Registration Schemes and training for door staff, training on drug registration, a Club and Pub Watch Scheme.

These schemes have attempted to direct a pro-active preventative approach to drink related violence and have generally been aligned with a high profile, high visibility enforcement aspect by the Police.

However, the problems experienced by the partner agencies have not necessarily and satisfactorily been resolved by previously tried solutions and certainly not in maximising the response by the Ambulance Service, Police and the Hospital to assaults or even self-inflicted drink related harm. In addition to this, the response times that the partners were able to give to bone fide emergencies were being affected by existing arrangements at times of expected high demand.

The solutions to the existing problems came in the following format:-

- The allocation of a triage centre at the Kingsway Surgery, which was given the wholehearted support of the practice partners, leasing their premises for a minimal fee to the Ambulance Service and Swansea Local Health Board. This meant that the centre was ideally located close to the hotspot for assaults.
- The production of an Ambulance Service operational plan providing a ground commander for the operation and developing a communication strategy between the Police, Ambulance Service and the Accident and Emergency Centre.
- To assist this operation, staff from the Divisional Police and the Special Constabulary were allocated to staff the triage centre. The purpose for this would be to maximise security and working conditions for staff there as well as to decrease the likelihood of assaults and threats against staff.
- The provision of a Senior Ambulance Officer to a multi-agency Command Room situated at Swansea Central Police Station. This room was linked to the Local Authority CCTV system and the Senior Ambulance Officer and Police personnel were able to monitor incidents and alert staff to sources of problems as and when they occurred. Police and Ambulance Service staff were directed from this room and the hospital were alerted in relation to any serious injury that occurred.
- The direction of resources based upon statistical evidence of previous activity. As a result of analysis of the data from the Ambulance Service, particular dates over the festive period were targeted, namely 19th/20th December and Wednesday, 31st December 2003. The joint agency activity was therefore targeted at times when the effect of the activity would pay greater dividends and when the measuring of the advantages of the project could be carried out easily linked to that activity.
- As a result of Police analysis of incidents of violence in the City Centre, extra uniformed resources were targeted to the violence

hotspots as part of a 'Swansea After Dark' campaign, the analysis clearly shows the Kingsway to have 12% more violent incidents than the next most violent street.

Results

During the evaluation period for December 2003, there were 187 violent crimes committed in the City Centre. This compares to 165 violent crimes for the same month in 2002. There were 53 incidents of violence at the Kingsway for this period as opposed to 58 for 2002.

The number of ambulance journeys made over the period of the triage centre operating reduced by 75% from the same period in 2002 with over 50% of the persons seen at the triage centre self-referring themselves to Hospital at a later date.

The average Police attendance at Morrision Hospital including travelling to and from the Accident and Emergency Unit and attending to interview witnesses, was reduced by 54 working hours, releasing these officers for duties near the main violence hotspot.

The number of reported incidents of abuse and violence inflicted upon Hospital staff reduced from 8 to 5 over this period. The total cost of staffing the triage centre for the period of the trial was £2,111.

The service delivered to the public by the Ambulance, Police and Hospital was of better quality due to the existence of the triage centre, with those who were injured being treated quicker, and those who had been subjected to an assault being seen by the Police in-situ near to the location of the assault, with witnesses being available to identify a possible assailant and the pressurised situation in which Hospital staff find themselves at peak times, being reduced.

Signpost for the future

It is proposed to re-invest in this project in the near future at times of peak demand. However, the project is being viewed as a staging post in inter-agency activity between the Ambulance Service, Hospital and the Police in which the reduction of violence in the City Centre and reduction of violence towards medical staff will be cornerstones of further activity, and in which a media campaign will be important in heightening the public profile of the problems experienced by each agency in tackling drink related violence.