Evidence-Based Practice
The recent push toward evidence-based practice (EBP) has brought new attention to correctional practice. EBP stresses that the programs and services we offer to offenders should be those that are related to subsequent reductions in recidivism (e.g. rearest, reconviction, reincarceration). Research suggests that effective correctional programs share similar characteristics in terms of targeting offender risk, needs, and responsivity. For instance, a number of studies show that programs that match higher-risk offenders to more intensive services (e.g., risk) and address dynamic criminogenic factors (e.g., needs) can significantly reduce recidivism (Andrews & Bonta, 2003; Andrews, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau, & Cullen, 2000). However, there has been much less research on the EBP principle of responsibility, which suggests that providers interact with offenders in ways that will effectively engage the offender. In placing Motivational Interviewing (MI) within an EBP framework, MI is best understood in terms of its consistency with the responsibility principle, because it suggests a way of talking with offenders to increase motivation for change.

Role of the Probation Officer
For those placed on supervision, probation officers are the main brokers of the probation process. Probation officers meet regularly with offenders, conduct intake and other assessments, report to the court on progress, and have a degree of latitude on the intensity of monitoring and programs to which offenders are referred. Thus, from a systemic standpoint, probation officers are uniquely situated to function as change agents who prepare an offender motivationally to comply with conditions of probation, engage in special programs, and make other positive changes. There has long been evidence that brief interactions can significantly influence client outcome (Miller, 2000; Moye, Finney, Swearingen, & Vergun, 2002), and recent evidence suggests that the relationship between an officer and the offender can be “a pivotal source of influence on the implementation of treatment mandates” (Skeem, Encandela, and Eto Louden, 2003, p. 444). The most effective relationship seems to involve a positive working alliance, balanced with aspects of procedural justice (i.e., firm but fair and respectful). In fact, one recent study that looked at the relationship between the officer and the offender found that probation outcome (probation violations, probation revocation, and new arrests) could be predicted by the quality of the dual-role relationship (Skeem, Eto Louden, Polaschek, & Camp, 2007). This is consistent with many studies in other fields that suggest that the style of the provider has a large impact on eventual client outcome (e.g., Miller, 2000).

Motivational Interviewing in Criminal Justice
Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a communication style that involves strategic use of questions and statements to help clients find their own reasons for change (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). MI borrows from Client-Centered Counseling in its emphasis on empathy, optimism, and respect for client choice (Rogers, 1961). MI also draws from Self-Perception Theory, which says that people become more or less interested in change based on how they talk about it (Bem, 1972). Thus, an offender who talks about the benefits of change is more likely to make that change, whereas an offender who argues and defends the status quo is more likely to continue in the present behavior. Finally, MI is also logically connected to the Stages of Change model, which says that people go through a sequence of stages when considering change (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). Although MI seems to work well throughout the change process, research suggests that it may be particularly useful for clients who are more oppositional or defiant, higher-risk, or otherwise less ready for change.

Because MI is a communication style, it is usually introduced as a set of stylistic prin-
creased recognition of their drinking behavior
Compared to control participants, those who
choose to change, and reduced offending, although
recent review focusing specifically on MI in
criminal justice (McMurran, in press) identi-
fied similar effects of MI across offending and
other areas of behavior change, there has been com-
prehensive support for MI in a much broader range of
settings (Heather, Rollnick, Bell, & Richmond,
2005). As illustrated in Table 1, many studies showed a lasting effect using this
approach over a period of weeks to years.

At its beginnings in addiction counsel-
ing, MI has been translated into a number of
behavior-change areas. MI currently has strong
research support in areas such as alcohol and
drug use, smoking cessation, medication com-
pliance, HIV risk behaviors, and diet/exercise.
Two recent meta-analyses of more than 70 MI
outcome studies in different areas suggest an
overall significant and clinically-relevant ef-
fect (Hettema, Steele, & Miller, 2005; Rubak,
Sandboek, Lauritzen, & Christensen, 2005).
Across a range of behavioral areas, MI was
significantly better than other approaches in
two out of four studies, and outperformed
traditional advice-giving in one study. Although
MI is not a panacea, it is now clear that the
theoretical underpinnings of MI can work ef-
fectively in a broad range of settings. MI is
likely to evoke the opposite of what
the officer is hoping for; the harder the
officer confronts, the harder the officer resists.
Individuals who are not ready for change,
who are in denial of their problems, who lack resistance, which in the past were assumed to be a hallmark of an unmotivated client, are instead largely a function of the provider’s communication style. To minimize resistance
toward change, officers first try to avoid ar-
guments wherever possible. Officers can also
use other strategies such as offering reflec-
tions (e.g., “It makes you angry, because you don’t want to think about
thesing the officer’s choice and control (e.g.,
‘Ultimately, it’s your choice. What do you
want to do here?’), or reframing the resist-
tance (e.g., ‘It does bother you that people are in your business, but I appreciate the
fact that you’re taking it seriously’). This skill
is probably one of the most difficult ones for
officers, because we get stuck in trying to
refute client resistance. In training, this is
emphasized through practice responding
to hypothetical client statements. It can be
strengthened through examining audio and
videos to see how and where arguments
occur.

Stages 6 and 7: Developing and Con-
sider an Opportunity for Change.
As talk about more change, the officer
can move from reinforcing change talk to de-
velling a plan for change. It can be difficult
to know when to push a client toward plan-
ning, because moving too early may cause resistance (e.g., “You can tell me all the things you can’t change. But when
completed at the appropriate time, the focus can
move from motivation to a concrete plan for
change. It again involves careful listening
to what clients are saying. One way to “tip the
balance” toward change is to ask an action
question about change (e.g., “What do you
want to do about that? What’s your plan?”).
Other ways of asking about change in the
hypoetical (e.g., “How would you do that
if you wanted to?”) or offering a menu of
options (e.g., “There are a few things you
might be interested in…Which of these
things do you think is most important to
you?”).
offenders with a 28-day incarceration sentence were randomized to receive or not receive a treatment program that included 12 MI sessions (Woodall et al. 2007). At 6, 12, and 24 months after discharge, those who received the program reported greater reductions in alcohol consumption and less drinking and driving, compared to participants who were only incarcerated. In addition, among participants who met criteria for antisocial personality disorder (ASPD), the program resulted in larger reductions in alcohol-related problems when compared to participants who did not receive treatment. Finally, in a probation setting, Harper and Hardy (2000) reported greater positive effects on probationers’ problem recognition as a result of being assigned to an MI-trained officer, as compared to probationers assigned to a non-MI trained probation officer. However, it is unclear whether the study used random assignment, and the control group also showed some progress over the course of the study.

In addition to this direct evidence, there are at least three practical reasons to believe that MI might be applicable to a criminal justice setting, and a community corrections setting in particular. First, MI has a strong track record in areas that may be relevant to community corrections, such as preparing clients to engage in alcohol and drug treatment programs (Baker et al. 2002; Daley, Salloum, Zuckoff, Kirisci, & Thase, 1998; Miller, Meyers, & Toungian, 1999). Further, MI has been shown to be effective in other settings where MI is said to possess content transferability and multi-focused, such as in medical consultations (Heather, Rollnick, Bell, & Richmond, 1996). Finally, large addictions treatment programs such as Project MATCH (Project MATCH Research Group, 1995) report similar effects of MI across offending and non-offending clients. Based on this rationale, a recent handbook published by the National Institute on Corrections (Rollnick, Walters, & Heather, 2003) outlines strategies for adapting MI to probation and parole settings. In particular, the handbook discusses ways to integrate the MI style with some of the technical features of community corrections, such as the dual officer role and its impact on behavior focus, and time constraints. This effort is consistent with past efforts to adapt MI to healthcare and other brief settings, while still retaining the overall style of the approach of listening skills.

As a problem. In another study, first-time DWI offenders with a 28-day incarceration sentence were randomized to receive or not receive a treatment program that included 12 MI sessions (Woodall et al. 2007). At 6, 12, and 24 months after discharge, those who received the program reported greater reductions in alcohol consumption and less drinking and driving, compared to participants who were only incarcerated. In addition, among participants who met criteria for antisocial personality disorder (ASPD), the program resulted in larger reductions in alcohol-related problems when compared to participants who did not receive treatment. Finally, in a probation setting, Harper and Hardy (2000) reported greater positive effects on probationers’ problem recognition as a result of being assigned to an MI-trained officer, as compared to probationers assigned to a non-MI trained probation officer. However, it is unclear whether the study used random assignment, and the control group also showed some progress over the course of the study.

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MI is geared toward motivating behavior change, such as decreasing alcohol or drug use, finding employment, paying fees, or other probation conditions. MI may also be useful for increasing the likelihood that an individual will participate in subsequent interventions. For instance, several studies have shown that use of MI prior to substance abuse treatment increases the retention rate while in treatment (i.e., fewer individuals drop out of treatment). In addition to behavior change, there may be other tasks that the officer needs to accomplish such as assessing progress, conveying information, assessing risk, or dispute factions. Even while focusing more narrowly on behavior change, MI is frequently integrated into other approaches such as cognitive behavioral techniques, skills training, or education. Different tasks might call for different techniques, but the overall style need not change (see Walters et al., 2007). Finally, MI also needs to be integrated into overall session management. No matter what the approach, officers have to make decisions about what topics are important at this moment, and what can be left for later. In our opinion, decisions about when to use or not use MI are best addressed through case planning, ongoing supervision and case reviews.

Motivational Interviewing: A Model Plan

As might be gleaned from the description above, learning MI can be more difficult than it appears. With the increase in training over the past five years, many officers have now been exposed to at least some of the tenets of MI through a variety of training venues, and many have likely used MI skills in a comprehensive way. This may be partially due to the training models that are frequently used by agencies. Though some criminal justice agencies have attempted to train officers through discrete one- or two-day workshops, research suggests that such workshops do not often result in long-term skill changes (Wal- ters, Matson, Baer, and Ziedonis, 2005). Although participants report an increase in knowledge or self-reported skill following brief workshops, measures of actual inter-

actions show much more modest gains (e.g. Miller and Mount, 2001). If the goal is to have officers who are using MI in a comprehen-
sive, effective way, a more useful training format appears to be a workshop followed by feedback and/or coaching (Miller, Yehne, Moyers, Martinez, and Pirritano, 2004).

To ensure comprehensive training for those districts interested in receiving it, the Administrative Office of the United States Courts (AO) developed a model implementation plan (see Table 1; the entire plan is available from the first author). The plan begins with a brief overview of evidence-based practice (officers can relate MI to the overall model of EBP and understand its role in effective supervision. Next, officers attend a two- or three-day workshop on basic MI skills. The plan emphasizes that the workshop trainer must be both qualified to train MI and familiar with the research in the field. The Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers (MINT: www motivationalinterviewing.org) provides a list of trainers who have demonstrated competence in MI and completed a training plan for training trainers.

As part of the initial implementation of this training plan, we asked officers to complete the Officer Responses Questionnaire (Walters et al., in press) before and after the initial two-day training, in order to evaluate gains as a result of attending the introductory workshop. On a sample of 80 officers in five districts, we found that officers increased their overall ORQ scores by 68 percent, sug-
gestng that officers did improve their basic listening skills as a result of attending the initial training.

Following the initial training, officers submit tape or videotapes of their use of MI with clients and receive monthly feedback on their skill development. Feedback is given us-

ing one of several different rating sheets that have been developed by various MI trainers, the training model and content for the districts to use. Finally, the plan utilizes a formal coding system, the Motivational Interven-

ing Treatment Integrity (MITI, Moyer, Martin, Pettinati, and Miller, 2003) to document listening skills as a result of attending the initial training.

The Model Implementation Plan and ac-

companying feedback instruments (i.e. feedback sheets, coding systems) were distributed to those districts receiving Research to Results grant funding from the AO, and grantees were re-

quired to follow the plan. However, the plan is considered a work in progress, and thus it is continuously revised based on feedback from the districts utilizing the plan. For instance, the original plan called for first-line supervi-
sors to provide coaching/feedback to officers. However, it was determined that many supervi-
sors did not have the experience to provide competent MI supervision. Thus, the plan was revised to indicate that feedback sessions should be provided by someone already qual-

ified to supervise MI. Additionally, districts were encouraged to develop internal capacit-

y for MI coaching/mimicking. The AO has granted funds by providing additional trainings to grant districts focused on develop-

ing MI coaches.

Future Directions

MI is intended as an additional tool for of-
cers to use in providing supervision and services to offenders. MI is not a replacement for everything officers currently use, nor is it appropriate for all situations (see Walters et al., in press). The motivational interview predicts drug use out-

swer on better understanding the role and effectiveness of MI in criminal justice settings (see Walters et al., 2007). The training plan outlined here was developed to ensure quality training of federal probation officers, in order to increase the likelihood that officers become proficient in their training.

The authors hope that the plan will continue to be informed by the experience of districts utilizing the plan, with modifications occurring as needed. There are also plans to develop outcome measures to determine the impact MI has on the supervision process. Ultimately, the goal of all EBP is to increase the safety of the community by providing the most effective supervision and programs available.

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and consolidating “commitment talk,” usually in the form of “I will” statements.

Stage 8: Switching Between MI and Other Approaches

MI is geared toward motivating behavior change, such as decreasing alcohol or drug use, finding employment, paying fees, or other probation conditions. MI may also be useful for increasing the likelihood that an individual will participate in subsequent interventions. For instance, several studies have shown that use of MI prior to substance abuse treatment increases the retention rate while in treatment (i.e., fewer individuals drop out of treatment). In addition to behavior change, there may be other tasks that the officer needs to accomplish such as assessing progress, conveying information, assessing risk, or disputing functions. Even when focusing more narrowly on behavior change, MI is frequently integrated into other approaches such as cognitive behavioral techniques, skills training, or education. Different tasks might call for different techniques, but the overall style need not change (see Walters et al., 2007). Finally, MI also needs to be integrated into overall treatment plan. No matter what the approach, officers have to make decisions about what topics are important at this moment, and what can be left for later. In our opinion, decisions about when to use or not use MI are best addressed through case planning, ongoing supervision and case reviews.

Motivational Interviewing Training: A Model Plan

As might be gleaned from the description above, learning MI can be more difficult than it appears. With the increase in training over the past five years, many officers have been exposed to at least some of the tenets of MI. However, we have likely used MI in a comprehensive way. This may be partially due to the training models that are frequently used by agencies. Though some criminal justice agencies have attempted to train officers through discrete one- or two-day workshops, research suggests that such workshops do not often result in long-term skill changes (Wal ters, Matson, Baer, and Zedouz, 2005). Although participants report an increase in knowledge or self-reported skill following brief workshops, measures of actual interaction show much more modest gains (e.g. Miller and Rollnick, 2001). If the goal is to have officers who are using MI in a comprehensive, effective way, a more useful training format appears to be a workshop followed by feedback and/or coaching (Miller, Yahne, Moyers, Martinez, and Pirritano, 2004). To ensure comprehensive training, officers who are learning MI often reach criterion levels of MI...


The Helpful Responses Questionnaire (HRQ) was developed by Miller and colleagues to measure the ability to respond empathically (Miller et al., 1991). The HRQ