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Assessment of outpatient commitment in randomised trials

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PlumX Metrics

The randomised controlled trial (RCT) is the gold standard of research and the clearest way to establish causal certainty. This design, however, was misapplied in three RCTs of involuntary outpatient civil commitment (also known as community treatment orders).^{1, 2, 3} In contrast with the positive outcomes regarding outpatient commitment in epidemiological studies,^{4, 5} a subsequent Cochrane review of these RCTs,⁶ suggested that outpatient commitment “was no more likely to result in better service use, social functioning, mental state or quality of life compared with standard ‘voluntary’ care”. This conclusion is potentially harmful for patients in need of oversight to protect their health and safety, and that of others. The conclusion is also unjustified because the outpatient commitment RCTs have major design, measurement, implementation, and analytical flaws.

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