

An Evaluation of Out-of-Hours Crisis Management for Individuals with Learning Disabilities

Dr. Raheen Fatima MRCPsych, CT3
Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust

Background

People with learning disabilities are at increased risk of mental health crises and may face barriers to timely, equitable and appropriate care, particularly out of hours. Clinicians working in crisis settings often make complex decisions under time pressure, with limited collateral information and reduced access to specialist learning disability expertise. This may contribute to diagnostic uncertainty, risk-averse decision-making, inappropriate admissions and opportunities for community-based interventions.



Aims and hypothesis



Aim

To understand how out-of-hours crises involving people with learning disabilities are identified, managed and supported across mental health crisis services, and to identify barriers, training needs and opportunities to improve care pathways and inter-service collaboration.



Hypothesis

Staff experience significant barriers in managing these crises, including limited specialist support, training gaps and unclear pathways.

Methods



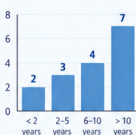
- A Microsoft Forms questionnaire was circulated to resident doctors, Emergency Department Psychiatry Service clinicians, mental health practitioners working out of hours and crisis team staff.
- Data collection: 16 December 2025 to 30 January 2026.
- Retrospective staff-reported data.
- No sensitive patient data collected.
- Conducted as a service evaluation within appropriate local governance arrangements.

Results (n = 16)

Respondent role



Years of clinical experience



Formal training



Effectiveness of crisis management



Common crisis themes

- Challenging behaviour
- Risk to self or others
- Mental health deterioration

Key barriers identified

- Limited access to specialist learning disability support out of hours
- Lack of learning disability-specific training
- Diagnostic overshadowing
- Communication challenges
- Difficulty assessing mental state

Identified training needs

- Mental health assessment
- Communication and de-escalation
- Risk assessment
- Legal frameworks
- Understanding behaviour that challenges

Conclusions

- This evaluation identified important gaps in out-of-hours crisis management for people with learning disabilities. Strengthening collaboration between crisis services and learning disability teams may improve staff confidence, reduce inappropriate admissions and support safer, more person-centred care.

Recommendations

- Targeted learning disability-specific training
- Clearer shared crisis pathways
- Improved documentation
- Defined points of contact
- Timely access to specialist advice

Full QI Report

Scan the QR code to access the full quality improvement service evaluation, including detailed findings and recommendations.



SCAN ME