Improving Substance Abuse Programs—From Intake to Group Therapy

Producing a guidebook on developing systems to improve alcohol and drug treatment and prevention programs

SUMMARY

In 2002, staff from CAB Health and Recovery Services (now Lahey Health Behavioral Services, an addiction treatment agency, wrote two case studies describing the agency's process for improving the quality of its group therapy and outpatient services.

Staff from Paths to Recovery: Changing the Process of Care for Substance Abuse Programs, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), used the case studies as a technical assistance resource for grantees and professionals in the substance abuse field.

Key Results

Project staff produced two case studies:

- Standardizing Group Therapy Based on Common Client Needs for Treatment (see the Bibliography) describes the process CAB went through to learn why clients relapse and how to improve outcomes.

- Outpatient Services: Improving Client Wait Times, No Show Rates, and Related Systems (see the Bibliography) describes how CAB identified system glitches at the agency that prevented access to care and sought to correct them.

Funding

RWJF provided $82,000 from 2002 to 2003 to support the project.

CONTEXT

RWJF funded the Paths To Recovery national program to strengthen the substance abuse field's ability to improve the care processes that facilitate patient access to and retention in substance abuse treatment programs.
*Paths to Recovery* has provided funding to treatment agencies across the country to redesign processes such as client intake, assessment, scheduling, outreach and family involvement. The grantees share and publish (via the website) strategies, successes and lessons learned from their efforts to create a more efficient treatment system.

**THE PROJECT**

Originally, project staff intended to create a guidebook, a peer-reviewed journal article and a Web-based toolkit on the Darwin Project, a CAB quality improvement project undertaken from 1999 to 2001 to improve operations in six business areas:

- Human resources
- Clinical care
- Support services
- Finance
- Development
- Administration.

Project staff redesigned the RWJF project with the goal of providing to the *Paths to Recovery* national program office two case studies based on CAB's experience with the Darwin Project, specifically in the area of clinical care.

**RESULTS**

Project staff produced two case studies, available online, which the *Paths to Recovery* national program office uses as technical assistance resources for grantees and the field.

- *Standardizing Group Therapy Based on Common Client Needs for Treatment* (see the Bibliography) describes the process CAB went through to learn why clients relapse and how to improve outcomes. Beginning with a broad objective of improving clinical care, staff discovered that the agency's group therapy program did not address relapse well or consistently. The quality improvement process led to a complete revamping of the way more than 20 clinicians across nine substance abuse treatment programs delivered group therapy.

- *Outpatient Services: Improving Client Wait Times, No Show Rates, and Related Systems* (see the Bibliography) describes how CAB identified system glitches at the agency that prevented access to care and sought to correct them. A consultant conducted a walkthrough of the client admission process from the perspective of the client; distributed client surveys and conducted client interviews asking clients, "What would make their treatment better?"; and distributed confidential staff surveys...
to assess the staff-management relationship. CAB staff then implemented the following changes to address the problems identified:

— Streamlined the intake and scheduling system.
— Improved the waiting area.
— Centralized billing at the corporate office while verifying insurance authorization at the point of service.
— Instituted a weekly staff meeting for management to learn from staff during the change process.

AFTERWARD

The Network for the Improvement of Addiction Treatment—composed of RWJF’s 10 Paths to Recovery agencies; 13 Strengthening Treatment Access and Retention (STAR) agencies, which are part of the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s Center for Substance Abuse Treatment; and six self-funded agencies (one of which is CAB)—formed a learning collaborative.

The purpose of the collaborative is to help treatment programs nationwide identify and improve the practices, policies and processes that can impact their ability to get patients in the door and keep them in treatment long enough to make a difference. In addition, CAB staff produced a booklet based on the case studies described in the Results section titled Could We Do This Better?: Improving Business Processes at a Substance Abuse Agency.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

Reports
