

NorthCare News

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Putting it all together—Integrated Co-Occurring Treatment

In the past, an individual would have to go to Community Mental Health for “mental health” treatment and to a separate substance abuse provider for “substance abuse” treatment. Now, scientific research has proven that when you combine care under one provider there is an increase in positive outcomes for

the individual. NorthCare Network has been working behind the scenes for several years, helping the local mental health agencies make this change in how services are delivered. Today, if you are being treated for a serious mental illness, you can expect a person centered planning process that will

include the services and supports you need if substance abuse is also a part of your life. This change may confuse us all in the beginning, however in the long run this change will improve the quality of your life if you are suffering from co-occurring disorders.

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Four Questions about Co-Occurring Treatment

1. Co-Occurring—What does that mean?

Co-Occurring is the current term for Dual Diagnosis; meaning that you are experiencing a serious mental illness as well as a substance abuse problem. Co-Occurring treatment is being offered at your Community Mental Health agency

2. Are there Co-Occurring Specialists here at my Community Mental Health Agency?

There are at least one or two people at all five Upper Peninsula Community Health agen-

cies that have been specifically trained in Co-Occurring treatment. Many of these individuals have been participating in co-occurring trainings for over four years now.

3. Does my agency have a Co-Occurring group?

Each CMH is providing Co-Occurring treatment a little differently. Check with your current provider to see if they have a local group. If they don’t have one going yet, advocate for yourself and ask that one be started.

4. Co-Occurring-What if I like my substance abuse

counselor and don’t want to change?

Change is hard and we suggest you work with the staff at the mental health agency to be sure your needs are met for care of both disorders. The NorthCare Substance Abuse Department will be working closely with the mental health agencies to be sure your treatment needs are going to be met. Remember- you have the right to appeal your treatment if you do not believe you are getting what you need.

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Three Ways to Help Your Doctor Help You

At the Annual Member Services Picnic in August, Dr. Kelley Mahar offered three ways to help your doctor help you. She suggested asking three key questions. The three questions are about the medications being recommended for your treatment. Dr. Mahar suggests writing the questions down on a sheet of paper and taking it in with you when you see the doctor. The questions are:

1. What is the quality or the research that supports this treatment for my illness? (How strong is the evidence that this medication will work for my specific illness?)
 2. How do the risks for this medication compare to the ways it might help me? (What are the risks versus the benefits including the risk of doing nothing.)
 3. After reviewing the list of medications I am taking, do you see any possible interactions? (This is only possible if you keep a list of ALL your current medications—a practice strongly recommended.)
- A footnote:** If you aren't sure you can keep track of all the answers, bring a support person with you to write down the answers while you talk with your doctor.

Health Tip:

Exercise can be used as prevention of an illness OR a prescription to decrease disease.

You Grade Us — Are We Doing Our Job?

Over the years you have told mental health and substance abuse providers how well they are doing by answering satisfaction surveys. The problem is that since each agency asks different questions at different times, NorthCare cannot compare the answers to see how well we are doing in all 15 counties. This year we want to use your feedback for a regional report card. A group from across the U.P. has developed a single questionnaire that will be used this year for our report card.

Your local CMH or SA Service Provider will mail

you this survey within 60 days after your annual Individual Plan of Service meeting or within 60 days after being discharged from all services. A self addressed stamped envelope will be included to make it easy to return. You will be asked to give your ratings on nine questions. Some of you will want to provide more comments and they can be added to the form. There will be room for you to write your name and phone number if you want to. Hopefully, you will be willing to grade us one or two times a year. Your local agency may want to ask you specific questions about their

work with you but that would be a different survey.

If you have a specific question or have a concern, put it on the survey with your name and phone number. You will receive a follow up call, and we will be sure your concerns are addressed. Personal information and specific concerns will remain private and will not be used when the surveys are added together to create a regional report card. Help improve your services by telling us what we are doing well and what we could be doing better.

Wanted

Short stories of your experiences with recovery for a future edition of the NorthCare News.

