

Behavioral Health Case Example

Recommendation 4a

To supplement public and private insurance for behavioral health services, hospital leaders should seek additional and specialized funding from foundations, employers, community philanthropies, grants, and governmental appropriations.

Lasting Hope Recovery Center Addresses Community's Behavioral Health Care Needs Alegent Health and the Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, NE

Summary

In 2004, the state of Nebraska passed a Behavioral Health Services Act. The intent of this legislation was to transition Nebraska away from reliance on state-run behavioral health institutions by promoting the development and expansion of community-based services. The state closed two of its three Regional hospitals. Those actions resulted in the need for inpatient beds to treat individuals with serious behavioral health care needs.

The Act also provided the impetus for a public private coalition – comprised of community-based providers, hospitals, state and local officials, consumers, educators and community leaders – to come together to enhance and expand care and treatment options for individuals afflicted with mental illness and substance abuse in the greater Omaha area. The coalition, in conjunction with a health care consultant group, conducted a study to determine what behavioral health care services were available and to identify what services were needed. The coalition recommended establishing a freestanding inpatient community behavioral health center. It also estimated what it would cost to establish an inpatient facility and how to finance it.

Community and Hospital

Omaha, located at the eastern edge of Nebraska along the Missouri River, is the largest city in Nebraska and is the county seat of Douglas County. The estimated population of Omaha in 2006 was 382,776, the median household income was \$42,321, and 10.1 percent of the families live below the poverty level. The new behavioral health center will serve the residents of Omaha and the five county region including Cass, Dodge, Douglas, Sarpy, and Washington counties.

Alegent Health Bergan Mercy Medical Center, a member of the Alegent Health System, licensed and has agreed to operate the Lasting Hope Recovery Center (LHRC). The system has nine acute care hospitals and nearly 100 sites of service in the region. It is experienced in providing behavioral health care services in a variety of settings. Alegent Health's five metropolitan hospitals have more than a century of service dedicated to caring for the mentally ill. More recently, Immanuel Medical Center and Mercy Hospital in Council Bluffs, Iowa both have established a rich history of providing high quality mental health care on an inpatient, outpatient, and partial hospitalization basis for adults. A residential treatment center for child/adolescents is also located on the Immanuel Medical Center campus.

The Nebraska Medical Center is a teaching hospital for the University of Nebraska Medical Center. The Medical Center is one of Nebraska's largest health care facilities and it is a designated Trauma Center for eastern Nebraska and western Iowa. Its inpatient psychiatric unit was always full and psychiatric patients were backing up in the ED, sometimes staying several days before appropriate placement could be found.

Program Overview

Omaha's mental health care system seriously lacked inpatient beds. The state was closing regional behavioral health hospitals, and a private behavioral health center in Omaha closed in 2003. The city went from having more than 160 acute adult beds in 1999 to 85 adult beds (excluding those for children and seniors) in 2003. Emergency rooms across the city found it difficult to provide the specialized care necessary for individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis. In addition, throughout the community there were wait lists for outpatient services and inadequate housing and residential treatment programs. In other words, there were few options for the treatment of people without financial means or family support, and many of Omaha's sickest people were on the street. Inadequate access to treatment programs for individuals affected by mental illness and substance abuse prevented people from obtaining needed treatment.

Passage of the Nebraska Behavioral Health Service Act provided an opportunity for representatives of the State Department of Health and Human Services to work with a team of public officials and community leaders to design a system that would enhance the provision of and quality of behavioral health care in the Omaha area. In conjunction with a consulting firm, the public-private partnership began discussions and planning for this community-based behavioral health care center about four years ago. Their intent was to create a new point of access for acute services that would meet both immediate needs and ongoing needs of consumers. They envisioned one central place where patients could obtain urgent behavioral care rather than going to numerous places (hospitals, outpatient centers, etc.) for treatment.

While state and local officials and health care leaders focused on how to pay for such care, philanthropists worked with business and community leaders to raise the funds to acquire a facility. The results of their efforts came to fruition in April 2008 at the opening of Lasting Hope Recovery Center that now provides comprehensive, compassionate care for patients in Omaha and surrounding counties regardless of their ability to pay. The center has brought together a number of inpatient and outpatient behavioral health care services in one facility and serves as a referral point for other related social services.

The LHRC provides 24-hour call-in crisis assessment, triage, and referral services to ensure that the immediate needs of patients are met efficiently. The 64-bed facility provides secure inpatient units for consumers in need of treatment for an immediate crisis; and for those needing short term to several weeks of inpatient treatment before they are ready for outpatient programs. It uses evidence-based best practices and real world experiences from the public and private sectors to establish a philosophy and model for care designed to change the way the community interacts with behavioral health needs. An individualized treatment plan is created for each patient based on their strengths, and progress is followed by a case manager. The goal of the center is to instill hope and a sense of possibility in patients and to help them achieve a positive self image and get back to their daily routine.

The center is staffed by more than 150 dedicated professionals including psychiatrists, psychologists, nurse practitioners, behavioral service technicians, and licensed alcohol and drug abuse counselors. In addition a Wellness Recovery Action Plan that focuses on relapse prevention, and certified peer support specialists are important elements of the program.

Any adult 19 years of age or older that resides in the five-county area and is experiencing a mental health or substance abuse problem is welcome regardless of their ability to pay. Staff assists consumers in applying for assistance. For individuals that do not have private health insurance and are ineligible for public programs, fees for service are based on a sliding scale.

An essential component of the continuum of care is the ability to access community resources upon discharge. Adjacent to the LHRC is a connecting building referred to as The Annex. This building conveniently houses other agencies such as Lutheran Family Services and the Salvation Army that provide this population with counseling services regarding anything from day-to-day problems to behavioral health emergencies. Following hospitalization, these organizations may

coordinate a variety of services essential to successful community living. For example, they may assist in finding living accommodations and/or residential treatment facilities for the homeless and job training and placement. The National Alliance on Mental Illness/Nebraska – an education, support, and advocacy organization – recently relocated to The Annex.

It is anticipated that the Lasting Hope Recovery Center will alleviate pressure on emergency departments and reduce the use of acute inpatient services in the Region, but more importantly it will get patients the right services promptly. The Center provides an inviting, non-sterile environment. The décor is intended to evoke feelings of comfort, security, and well-being among patients and family members. It was designed with the help of patients who provided advice on what would be helpful to patients as they transition through the continuum of care and successfully re-enter the community.

Program Funding

It has been estimated that the annual operating costs for Lasting Hope Recovery Center will be approximately \$15 million, with about \$10 million coming from Medicare, Medicaid and private insurance payments. State funds that have previously been used to provide inpatient services at two of the states now-closed Regional hospitals were redirected to support the expansion of community-based services. In fact the state has committed \$5 million annually to support operation of LHRC. In addition, moving away from the state institutional model of care ensures greater access to Medicaid funding for the provision of local behavioral health services.

Spearheaded by local philanthropists, community leaders formed a nonprofit organization – the Behavioral Health Support Foundation – that raised the funds necessary to establish the Center and related programs. Once convinced that the cost of ongoing operations of LHRC would be covered by public and private programs, philanthropists worked with business leaders, private foundations, and generous individuals to raise the funds necessary to acquire and renovate an inpatient facility and to enhance related social services. In a show of extraordinary community support the foundation raised more than \$25.5 million. Approximately \$21 million was earmarked for capital expenses such as the purchase and renovation of a former psychiatric facility located in downtown Omaha and for the center's start up-costs. The remaining funds, approximately \$4 million, are for capital expenses to enhance community-based organizations that provide related services. For example, additional housing and residential treatment centers for individuals with behavioral health care issues are being acquired.

Alegent Health and The Nebraska Medical Center have each pledged \$5 million to cover any unexpected operating costs for a period of 10 years.

Obstacles and Challenges

There were no major obstacles, Omaha is a very caring community and is accustomed to working together to address community-wide matters. Nevertheless, there are always some bumps along the way. The building purchased for the center was in poor condition and required more work than originally anticipated. Staffing took awhile, but by the time the center opened, 90 percent of the nursing staff and 75 percent of the psychiatrists were on board.

Success Factors

As the center has only been open for three months, it is too soon to lay claim to many specific accomplishments. However, the Lasting Hope Recovery Center has provided a new point of access to care and more than 200 patients have received timely inpatient treatment. In addition, LHRC has a 26 percent diversion rate that has resulted in many individuals being stabilized and referred to more appropriate providers in the regions' network of community-based health care providers.

Collaboration on the part of public officials, health care professionals, and community leaders was essential in obtaining all of the elements necessary to establish and operate the center and meet the behavioral health needs of the community, especially those of the uninsured and underserved population.

The success of this effort is also attributed, in part, to Omaha's culture that is characterized by a strong family orientation and commitment to the collective needs of the community.

Lessons Learned and Advice to Others

In order to accomplish what has been established in Omaha, you need the broad based support of all stakeholders. In this case that included state and local officials, health care providers, consumers, philanthropic, business, and other community leaders. Additionally, the individuals involved must be personally committed to the success of the project.

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