



# Mental Health Matters

News and Events at the South Carolina Department of Mental Health

August 11, 2011

## SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH COMMUNITY FORUMS GENERATE RESULTS

By Melanie Ferretti, Office of Network Services

The year has flown by and the Department of Mental Health's (DMH) community forum project has come to an end. I had the good fortune to be a part of the project, and attended twenty-three of the twenty-five forums facilitated by State Director John H. Magill, which were held across the state and hosted by each of the Department's

seventeen community mental health centers, four hospitals, and four nursing homes.

The forums were held on Thursday evenings, from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30

p.m.: two per month from July 2010 through May 2011, and three in June 2011.

With audience size ranging from 25 to 103, the forums were attended by approximately 1,500 people who affect or are affected by mental health services. State agency representatives, doctors, clinicians, clergy, teachers, law enforcement, judges, social workers, parents, advocates, federal, state, and local elected officials, and others were invited to participate in open discussion.

I was pleased that many legislators and other elected officials also took the time to attend. For example, at the Aiken-Barnwell Mental Health Center forum, Senator Shane Massey talked with the audience about several issues, predominantly advocacy. He recommended that members of the audience, especially center board

members, make appointments with their local and state elected officials and advised them to use that time to explain how mental health

services are vital to the community. I was also impressed with the number of elected officials from the upstate who attended forums: Senator Thomas Alexander, Senator William O'Dell, Representative Mike Gambrell, Representative Ann Thayer, and Representative Brian White, to name a few. I believe this strong support is due to the close proximity of three outstanding DMH facilities: Patrick B. Harris Psychiatric Hospital, Richard M. Campbell Veterans Nursing Home, and

**THE FORUMS FOCUSED ON MENTAL HEALTH AND LONG-TERM CARE ISSUES AND PROVIDED OPPORTUNITIES TO IDENTIFY AVAILABLE SERVICES AND AREAS OF NEED WITHIN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY.**

## DMH/DOADAS CO-LOCATION COMPLETE

Tracy LaPointe, Public Affairs

During the week of May 16, 2011, the 35 staff of the SC Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services completed their move into vacant space within the SCDMH Central Administration building in Columbia.

Like many agencies, the SCDMH has downsized over the past several years, resulting in available office space in its Central Administration building. During a press conference held January 14, Governor Nikki Haley explained that utilizing this space would result in an estimated taxpayer savings of \$700,000 over the next four years. According to the Governor, this savings, along with the agencies' similar missions made co-location a "no-brainer."

Following the Governor's announcement, SCDMH and DAODAS staff, along with the Governor's office, worked as a team to ensure the move was as seamless and efficient as possible.

"We are very grateful to the staff of DMH for all their help during our move," said DAODAS Director Bob Toomey. "We are especially appreciative of the warm hospitality DAODAS has received as we settle into our new home."

Anderson-Oconee-Pickens Community Mental Health Center.

The forums focused on mental health and long-term care issues and provided opportunities to identify available services and areas of need within the local community. Areas of excellence and areas in need of improvement, as well as unmet needs in the community, were discussed; frequently, ideas and offers of collaboration and sharing of resources were developed. A few of the forums are now light-heartedly referred to as “love fests” due to the numerous compliments given to center staff. At those forums, it was apparent that the leadership and staff of these centers have close working relationships within their community that make it possible to accomplish the Department’s mission to support the recovery of people with mental illness.

Considering one-in-four people is affected by mental illness, it was moving, but not surprising to hear impromptu testimonials from audience members about how they or their loved ones have battled mental illness, and are working towards recovery with care received from the mental health community. Disregarding the stigma too often associated with mental illness, some spoke publicly for the first time about their experiences.

Each forum addressed both local and statewide issues. Statewide issues included crowded emergency rooms, the need for more training for law enforcement, meeting veterans’ increasing needs, providing school-based services, the budget crisis, and the need for more active advocacy.

Patient wait time and emergency room crowding by those in a behavioral health crisis were common problems raised at the forums. Magill used these

opportunities to promote the DMH telepsychiatry program, which has been specifically designed to help address this problem. Funded by a grant from The Duke Endowment, to date DMH has implemented the telepsychiatry program in twenty-two hospitals emergency rooms across the state.

Telepsychiatry, which is available during and after normal business hours, uses a mobile high-definition video cart with two-way audio and a remote-controlled pan/tilt/zoom enabled camera to provide a way for patients and local hospital staff to interact with a DMH psychiatrist both verbally and visually. After the consultation, the emergency room (ER) staff and the DMH psychiatrist discuss the observations and work together to develop a patient management plan. This results in better patient assessment, quicker initial treatment, and reduced length of stay in ERs. Telepsychiatry is a win-win for patients and hospitals; the quality of initial patient care increases, while hospital expenses decrease.

Law enforcement officers at the forums voiced a need for additional training. Bill Lindsey, the Executive Director of the South Carolina state chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI SC), who attended most of the forums, shared information about NAMI’s Crisis Intervention Training (CIT). CIT is specialized training that provides law enforcement officers with the skills, tools, and tactics to recognize the signs and symptoms of major mental illnesses and persons in crisis, and effectively intervene and safely de-escalate a crisis. DMH and NAMI SC have partnered to make the 40 hour CIT training available, at no cost, to all divisions and jurisdictions of law enforcement across

the state. According to Lindsey, so far seven classes have been scheduled as a result of the forums.

Three of the four DMH nursing homes are specifically for the care of South Carolina veterans who have served honorably in our Nation’s military. At the veterans’ nursing home forums, issues such as the need to improve early detection and treatment methods for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other mental illnesses and how South Carolina will meet the increasing demand for long-term care for veterans, were discussed. The Veterans Policy Academy (VPA) is a consortium of federal, state, and non-governmental agencies, which seeks to identify needed services and make them easily accessible, ultimately helping South Carolina’s veterans and their families live healthy, successful lives. VPA co-chairs General (ret.) George Goldsmith and Colonel (ret.) Phil Butler were guest speakers at these forums. After hearing General Goldsmith and Colonel Butler speak, several members of the forum audiences have joined the VPA.

Parents frequently voiced the need for increased school-based services, wherein DMH community mental health center counselors, located in schools on a full or part-time basis, provide intensive, comprehensive services that are flexible, easily accessible, and integrated into the everyday school setting. School-based services typically include individual, family, and group counseling, crisis intervention, psychiatric consultation, rehabilitation services, consultations with school staff, and staff development workshops. During FY2010, 239 DMH mental health professionals provided approximately 188,000 services to more

than 14,000 children in 402 schools. As a result of forum requests, steps are being taken to make it possible to add school-based programs in certain school districts.

The forums evolved over the course of the year with many forum participants expressing that community advocacy is vitally important to the success of DMH, as all state agencies have been facing steep budget cuts. The DMH budget has been cut nearly \$100 million since 2008, yet DMH continues to serve almost 100,000 people yearly, approximately 30,000 of whom are children. While the Agency strives for maximum productivity and streamlined operations, the number of services received by clients has been reduced. The effects of these reductions are far-reaching. It costs approximately \$2,400 to provide outpatient services to a patient per year. People not receiving adequate assistance from DMH may end up in hospital emergency rooms multiple times over the course of a year, each visit costing at least \$2,400. Others may be incarcerated, costing \$17,000 per year. And some end up homeless, which is a tragic reflection on our society. All of these alternatives are far more expensive in the long-run. It is a simple case of pay now or pay more later.

An outstanding example of a positive outcome resulting from the forums occurred at Santee-Wateree Community Mental Health Center. In an effort to stay within budget without cutting services, Center Director Richard Guess requested that Lee County temporarily suspend the lease cost for use of the county owned building which currently houses the Lee County Mental

Health Clinic. With the support of the county administrator, the probate judge and others who attended the Santee-Wateree community forum, Lee County Council voted to suspend lease payments for the Bishopville Clinic for the next two years. This represents a total savings of \$34,000 over the next two calendar years for the Santee-Wateree Community Mental Health Center and demonstrates a willingness on the part of Lee County to think “outside of the box” to help ensure continued services for its citizens.

As a result of advocacy by local citizens, other counties have shown their support for mental health services by lessening proposed cuts or allocating larger county appropriations to the Department of Mental Health.

Local voices were heard and action plans were formed to address issues that were raised. After each forum, DMH Leadership had a debriefing meeting to establish specific action plans to address the concerns brought up in the forums. DMH administration management and center liaisons will continue to monitor the progress of each action plan. The Division of Community Mental Health Services’ Community Services Coordinator Jeff Ham said, “The forums were great. They gave DMH an opportunity to shine in the community and galvanized relationships with stakeholders and local politicians. After hearing Mr. Magill speak, many of the forum participants expressed surprise at the Agency’s scope of operations and history.” The forums received such positive feedback that each facility has been charged to hold an annual forum,

to be facilitated by the center/hospital director.

During Fiscal Year 2010 DMH mental health centers and satellite clinics provided approximately 1,330,000 outpatient services to almost 94,000 residents. The four psychiatric hospitals and four nursing homes served approximately 5,300 patients and provided more than 545,000 bed days.

South Carolina’s long history of caring for those with mental illness can be traced back to 1690, when the Lords Proprietors of the Province of Carolina established that the mentally ill should be cared for at the expense of local government. Admitting the first patient to the Babcock building in 1828, South Carolina was the second state in the Nation, preceded only by Virginia, to provide state-funded facilities and long term care for those suffering from mental illness. And even though South Carolina is currently in financial crisis, concerned South Carolinians should ask their legislators to make the continued funding and support of DMH a priority, so that we can carry on the tradition of caring for those least able to care for themselves.

According to Magill, “The forums have generated excitement which will have long-term positive benefits within the community. They met the goals of enhancing community relations and raising awareness of mental health issues and the tangible results of the forums have far exceeded expectations.”

---