

The Power of Peer Support VHA Mental Health Services September 21, 2012

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Objectives of Presentation

- Acquaint attendees with the background of transforming VHA Mental Health Services to implement peer support in VHA.
- Provide a current snapshot of peer support.
- View the future of peer support.
- Show one Peer Specialist's application of peer support services in VHA.

Background and Implementation of Peer Support

President's New Freedom Commission (2003)

- “We envision a future when everyone with a mental illness will recover. . a future when everyone with a mental illness at any stage of life has access to effective treatment and support—essentials for living, working, learning, and participating fully in the community.”
- “Recovery from mental illness is now a real possibility.”
- Recommendation #2.2: Involve consumers and families fully in orienting the mental health system toward recovery.

Recovery-oriented services and supports are often successfully provided by consumers through consumer-run organizations and by consumers who work as providers in a variety of settings, such as **peer-support**...

Background and Implementation of Peer Support

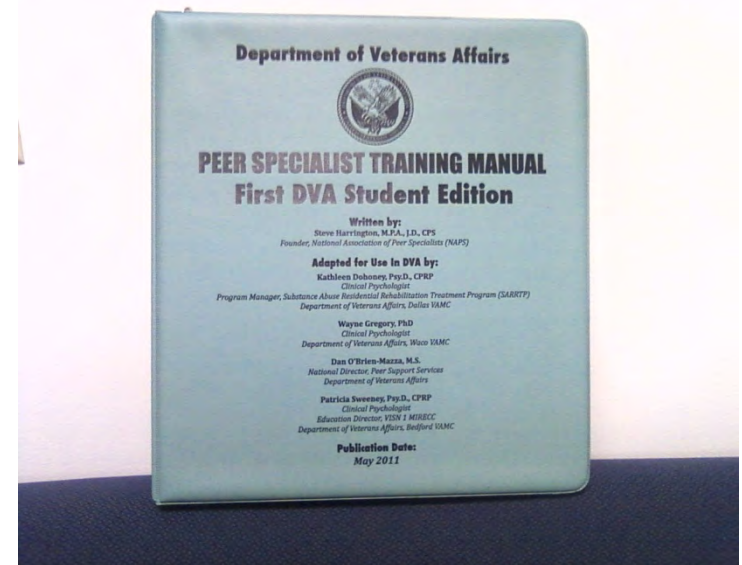
- VHA Mental Health Strategic Plan (2004)
 - Mental Health is essential to overall health
 - Promote recovery in mental illness
 - Involve Veteran consumers and families on recovery
- VHA HANDBOOK 1160.01, *Uniform Mental Health Services in VA Medical Centers and Clinics*, September 2008.
 - Mental health services must be recovery-oriented.
 - All medical centers and very large CBOCs must provide individual or group counseling from peer support technicians for Veterans treated for SMI when this service is clinically indicated and included in the Veteran's treatment plan.
 - Other CBOCs must make peer counseling available for Veterans with SMI when it is clinically indicated and included in the Veteran's treatment plan.

Developing Peer Support in VHA

- Developed Peer Support Technician Position Description in 2006.
 - Quick and relatively easy.
 - Ultimately, not an accurate reflection of Peer Support job duties.
 - No authority to require Veteran status.
 - No authority to inquire about mental health history.
 - No authority to require certification.
- Approximately 130 Peer Support Technicians were hired In VHA Mental Health Programs in 2006-07.

Developing Peer Support in VHA

- To Assure Quality
 - Evaluate certification programs.
 - Establish VA-specific competencies.
 - Develop Peer Specialist/Supervisor training manuals.
 - Establish policy allowing peers to document in CPRS.



Developing Peer Support in VHA

- Goals
 - Develop peer support workforce, integrate peers among all mental health programs.
 - Educate the field about the hiring of peers, including the assessment of the Veteran's recovery status.
 - Establish "VA competency standards" for peers.
- Accomplishments
 - Approximately 250 peers have been hired.
 - Competencies developed.
 - Documentation standards developed.
 - VA Standards for certification established.
 - VA Peer Specialist/Supervisor Training Manual published.
 - Peer Support Handbook published.
 - E-mail groups and conference calls established.
 - Funding provided to assist peers in becoming certified.

Developing Peer Support in VHA

- Strong Support from All Levels of VHA.
 - Dr. Antonette Zeiss, Mental Health Services.
 - Dr. Mary Schohn, Office of Mental Health Operations.
 - Stakeholders (VSOs, mental health consumer organizations, mental health professional organizations).
- Congressional Support
 - PL 110-387 (Veterans' Mental Health And Other Care Improvements Act Of 2008): Peer Specialists must be Veterans who have recovered or are recovering from a mental health condition and are certified to provide peer support services.
 - PL 111-163 (Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010): VHA must establish a contract with a not-for-profit organization to train peers to provide peer support services.

Current Status

- Completed New Peer Specialist Job Classification
 - GS-102 job series.
 - Grade levels from 6 to 9.
 - Entry level at grade 5, Peer Apprentice.
 - Evaluating the impact of the new classification to determine future direction.
- Contract for Peer Certification Training
 - Should be awarded before the end of the fiscal year.
- Expansion of Peer Support
 - Funding secured to hire an additional 500 Peer Specialists in FY 2012 and FY 2013.
 - Initially targeted those facilities with volunteer peer support or with a single employed peer.
 - Goal to have minimum of three Peer Specialists at every VAMC and two at every Very Large CBOC.

Current Status

- VHA Peer Support Services regarded as a leader in the nation:
 - Single largest employer of Peer Specialists.
 - Identified by the Department of Defense Center of Excellence as a best practice (January 2011).
 - VHA Peer Support competencies and training manuals are used by private sector organizations.
 - VHA Peer Support leadership invited to speak at national VA and non-VA conferences.

Where Do We Go From Here?

- Firmly Establish Peer Support.
 - Integral part of VHA mental health.
 - Address any resistances from management or front-line staff in the field.
 - Determine if job classification for Peer Specialist needs to be improved.
 - Explore with Office of Personnel Management the possibility of defining Peer Specialists as a “new and emerging profession.”
 - Expand peer support beyond traditional mental health.
 - Currently discussing with Patient-Aligned Care Teams (PACT) and specialty medical care.
 - Exploring the idea of peer-run respites.

The Future is Now!

Current Peer Services

Groups include:

- Recovery through Creative Arts
- Peers with Diabetes
- Smoking Cessation
- Weight Self-Management
- and many more within Bedford VA programs!



For More Information Call the Peer Services message line at **781-687-3249**

or email BedfordPeerServices@va.gov

Edith N. Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital, 200 Springs Road

Bedford, MA 01730, 1-800-VETMED1 (1-800-838-6331)

Sponsored by the Bedford VA Peer Advisory Committee & the New England Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center (MIRECC)

The Power of Peer Support

VHA Mental Health

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“How Can I Show The Power of Peer Support?”

- What is my role in the care of the Veteran?
- What impact do I play in a Veteran’s recovery?
- Struggle with the presentation.... Where do I begin?

Where Do I Begin?

- Where else? With my peers, the people I work with daily, the treatment team I am part of!
 - Dr. Stephen Smith (Program Coordinator)
 - Dan O'Brien-Mazza (My Fearless Leader)
 - Ms. Connie Douglas (Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner in PRTP)
 - Numerous other CPSCs around the country....
 - The list goes on and on....

Through the words of my peers, I began to see it's not always what we say, it's what we do...

- B.M. - 60 y/o WM – Vietnam Combat Veteran
 - PTSD/Major Depression/Poly Substance Abuse
 - Anger – Acceptance
 - Illness – Possibility / Hope For Life After Diagnosis
 - Isolation – Increased Involvement With Daughters
- L.R. – 53 y/o WM – Non- Combat Veteran
 - Advanced Degrees/Genius Level IQ/Paranoid Schizophrenia
 - Unemployed X 8 Years – Currently Working as a Volunteer CPSC
 - Estranged From Daughter For 20 Years – Re-Established Contact
 - Frequent Hospitalizations – Living In A Group Home, Marked Decrease In Hospitalizations
- B.B. – 25 y/o WM – OEF/OIF Combat Veteran
 - Major Depression/PTSD
 - Denial – Acceptance
 - Guilt – Understanding
 - Isolation/Despair – Hope

What Do Veterans Say About Peer Support?

- During recent Mental Health Operations and CARF site visits, Veterans reported that Peer Support Services provided at Mountain Home were among some of the best of all the services offered.
 - “He really knows what we are going through and understands me better than anyone else.”
 - “You can tell he really relates to what it is like to have been through this.”
 - “Knowing that Jason has been through some of the same things we have all been through and can still manage to make it, gives us hope. He treats us like we are just normal people you know? And that feels good...to be treated normal...like we’re not broken.”

Not About Me...About We

- PEER SUPPORT is NOT about any one person.
- PEER SUPPORT is NOT about any one thing.
- PEER SUPPORT IS about a connection.
- PEER SUPPORT IS about a shared experience.
- PEER SUPPORT IS about working WITH ONE ANOTHER.

Questions?



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