

SPOTLIGHT

Behavioral Health: How Can We Help?

Emmett Ervin, MPA CPHQ

Admit it. We are at a point where violent acts involving an individual with a mental illness do not faze us as much as they used to. The event may involve a high school shooting or a police officer being gunned down by an individual who had spoken recently of carrying out that fantasy. Either way, we hear about these incidents more than we once did. Are such occurrences the result of a healthcare system not designed to properly and effectively treat the mentally ill? Or have we given up on this population within our society?

Either way, we will have an avenue to voice our opinions through the newly developed NAHQ Behavioral Health Special Interest Group (SIG). A NAHQ SIG is a community that is centered on a topic of interest that is relevant to healthcare quality. SIGs connect people with similar interests, allowing them to learn from each other, promote their specialties, identify upcoming challenges, and endeavor to advance the practice.

The SIG will discuss several aspects of the healthcare industry that may contribute to the current state of behavioral health, for example, reimbursement, (age-appropriate) competencies, retention of core personnel, timely discharge planning, and effective communication with the individual patient. SIG members will be at the forefront of interest-specific discussion.

I had the privilege of working for a post-acute care company in the 1990s that owned the philosophy that employees who paid attention to the following areas would concurrently become better employees, while improving the services they provided:

Results Orientation. Will the anticipated outcome be attained? Well-run organizations look at the data and outcomes to discern the effectiveness of their services.

Cultural Sensitivity. Do we treat the mentally ill with dignity and respect? Respecting the needs of each individual is in the mission statements of most of our organizations. Do we strive to meet our mission statement with this population?

Sense of Urgency. Does the individual receive the appropriate service in a timely fashion? If we cannot provide a service, how quickly and effectively can we refer the individual to a program where services are supplied in a more timely fashion? In short, we need to accommodate or advocate.

Thanks to NAHQ, we now have another forum for addressing these and other matters that are important to us. As noted in the September 2008 issue of *NAHQ E-News* (in "Message from the Board"), NAHQ will launch four SIGs (acute care, behavioral health, critical access and rural health, and managed care) in January 2009. The Behavioral Health SIG will offer a real-time networking platform for individuals who have a passion for behavioral health services. SIG members will have a forum through which to network, share information, and regularly learn from one another and from experts in their field. Listservs will be one mode of communication. Listserv users will determine the content and will address day-to-day operations, best practices, and emerging trends, as well as other topics deemed relevant and helpful to users. NAHQ is expecting the SIG Listservs to be a great success.

National Association for Healthcare Quality
800/966-9392, 847/375-4720
www.nahq.org

Please feel free to contact SIG Director Denise Donnelly at 214/529-1181 or DonnellyD@AETNA.com with questions about any of the NAHQ SIGs. Irrespective of the setting each of us works in, all of us work with the mentally ill. We have an opportunity to effect change at many levels. Isn't our goal to have a healthcare system that recognizes, and addresses, the holistic needs of the individual? We are a compassionate industry. Let's help where we can!

Emmett Ervin, MPA CPHQ, is state director of risk management at Kindred Healthcare, Providence, RI. He is the outgoing president of the District of Columbia Association for Healthcare Quality and a member of NAHQ's special interest group (SIG) task team.