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Silver and Bronze Achievement Awards

Silver Award: Project for Psychiatric Outreach to the Homeless, Center for Urban Community Services, New York City—Providing Psychiatric Services to Homeless and Formally Homeless Adults

Although many homeless people have mental illnesses that affect their ability to seek and maintain housing, it is rare for them to voluntarily seek psychiatric treatment. The Center for Urban Community Services' (CUCS's) Project for Psychiatric Outreach to the Homeless (PPOH) addresses this treatment gap by being the only program in the United States that is exclusively dedicated to recruiting, employing, supporting, and training community psychiatrists to work with homeless and formerly homeless adults in community-based programs and other non-traditional settings.

PPOH began in 1986 as a district branch task force of the APA that was focused on recruiting psychiatrists to work as volunteers with homeless people in New York City. Within a decade it attracted the support of public funding agencies, and by 2005 it was providing services at 32 programs in New York City through the efforts of paid and volunteer staff members. In 2006 PPOH merged with CUCS and has since grown to provide services at 54 program sites in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn.

To provide ongoing treatment to even more homeless and formerly homeless adults with mental illness, PPOH recently initiated the development of a volunteer network of psychiatrists who provide free services to formerly homeless people in their private offices.

In recognition of its efforts and innovative approaches to bringing psychiatric treatment services to homeless adults and individuals living in supportive housing, the PPOH was selected to receive APA's Silver Achievement Award for 2010.

There are approximately 40,000

homeless people in New York City, about 10,000 of whom are single adults. About 75% of single, adult homeless people suffer from severe and persistent mental illness, substance use disorders, or both; yet only about 20% of homeless people with mental illness engage in psychiatric treatment in clinics and medical centers.

Because of the small numbers of homeless people voluntarily seeking psychiatric treatment, one of the primary challenges of PPOH psychiatrists is to engage this population. In order to accomplish this goal, PPOH embraces a person-centered approach. This approach begins with meeting people at their current location, whether it is at a shelter cafeteria or park bench, and continues with making psychiatric treatment as collaborative a process as possible.

PPOH also helps to address the challenges that occur when a psychiatrist is transplanted from an office practice or clinic to a community or street setting. In order for psychiatric care to be delivered in an effective manner, it is necessary to reorient the psychiatrist and help programs effectively utilize a psychiatrist. To help psychiatrists, PPOH continues to develop and distribute a handbook that incorporates current literature about homelessness and psychiatry and details the experience of PPOH staff psychiatrists. This handbook provides guidance for managing the variety of situations that community psychiatrists face daily and that are unique to work in the field—from how to help homeless people take medicine accurately and consistently to how to integrate psychiatric practice into social service settings. PPOH also teaches programs how to integrate a psychiatrist into their teams, how to communicate clinical information, and

how to safely and accurately monitor medications.

PPOH also faces two other challenges: homeless service providers generally have difficulty paying for the services of psychiatrists and the programs most in need of psychiatric services are the least able to afford these services. To overcome these problems, PPOH leverages government and foundation funding in order to keep the cost of psychiatric services affordable. On average, CUCS's government and foundation grants provide a 59% subsidy to the sites where PPOH provides services. PPOH also remains committed to expanding the number of sites at which it can provide services. To help ensure psychiatric care is delivered where it is most needed, in the past year PPOH began serving eight new programs, including soup kitchens, food pantries, and a housing program for homeless youths aging out of foster care. Fifty percent of PPOH contract sites are located in nationally designated health professional shortage areas, and PPOH continues to work to identify additional programs in these areas in need of low-cost psychiatric services.

PPOH employs 24 full-time, part-time, and per diem psychiatrists and four volunteer psychiatrists. The medical director provides clinical and administrative oversight and supervision of the program. The director of program operations coordinates placements of psychiatrists, responds to new requests for services, and ensures staff and program adherence to practice standards. The assistant program director manages fiscal operations of the program, reports to funders, and uses information systems to document, manage, and report on services delivered. The assistant medical director for education and training supervises the homeless psychiatry rotation, a program of 12–16 psychiatry residents rotating for three hours per week during the academic year. The assistant medical director for clinical

operations provides supervision for psychiatrists, investigates incidents, and monitors patient satisfaction, psychiatrist performance, and program site effectiveness.

With this staff, PPOH provides nearly 500 hours per week of psychiatrist time to 54 community programs serving homeless New Yorkers. In 2009 PPOH psychiatrists provided services to over 3,000 unique individuals, provided ongoing treatment to almost 700 people, and had over 10,000 visits. PPOH provides psychiatrists for all seven Manhattan street outreach teams and for the Bronx street outreach team. By conducting the evaluations needed to secure housing and entitlements, PPOH has helped these teams house 500 people over the past three years. PPOH also provides psychiatrists to 20 supportive housing programs and has helped over 1,500 persons with mental illness remain psychiatrically stable and housed.

Funding for PPOH is derived from various sources. In fiscal year 2009 PPOH received \$438,139 from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, \$334,560 from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, \$400,000 from the Robin Hood Foundation, and \$50,000 from the van Ameringen Foundation. An additional \$878,878 in fee-for-service reimbursement was provided by the 54 program sites.

PPOH has seen much success and is considered to be a model program that could be of great benefit to other organizations. PPOH's model of training community psychiatrists to work with homeless adults and then embedding these psychiatrists at street outreach programs, shelters, and other programs serving homeless adults can be readily implemented in other large metropolitan areas.

PPOH also takes several tacks to advance the field of community psychiatry. Each year PPOH hosts 12–16 residents in clinical rotations, serves as a placement site for the Columbia Public Psychiatry Fellowship, and participates in the community psychiatry courses of several psychiatry residency and fellowship programs. PPOH also has an online course for residents and fellows that provides information about the social, economic, and clinical

issues pertaining to working with the homeless population, along with practical guidance about how to bring psychiatric practice to the homeless community.

PPOH also provides training to nonpsychiatrist groups, including the Urban Justice Center and to the Chronic Illness Demonstration Project based at Bellevue Hospital Center. These training activities educate clinicians and others about the relationship between homelessness and mental illness and about person-centered approaches and evidence-based practices that are used in working with homeless people with mental illness. In addition, PPOH's seminar and case conference series for psychiatrists have recently been endorsed by the Medical Society of the State of New York to grant up to 34 Continuing Medical Education credits per year.

PPOH engages in ongoing program evaluation to ensure that its services continue to meet patients' needs while continually developing best practices for psychiatry focused on helping homeless adults. Through case conferencing and quality assurance and incident management committees, PPOH provides formal structure for the evaluation of its services. These activities have led to the establishment of outcome targets for services each year. Outcomes are tracked by program type. In total, PPOH served 3,041 individuals in 2009. Six-

ty-five percent of the individuals who received ongoing treatment showed improvement in their psychiatric conditions, as measured by the Clinical Global Impression Scale. In addition, each year PPOH asks a sample of its patients to complete a Patient Satisfaction Survey in an attempt to examine how effective it is at providing person-centered care. Through this survey, PPOH has found that its patients generally find their engagement with psychiatrists to be respectful and productive. A small number of patients have commented over the years that they wished that their PPOH psychiatrist could see them more frequently. To help meet this need, PPOH is working to recruit clinicians who can provide pro bono therapy and continues to explore additional sources of funding to bring more psychiatrists to this essential work.

This innovative program provides services to a population of psychiatric patients who would otherwise be unable to obtain psychiatric care. The PPOH has shown promise in its success in overcoming financial barriers and in its success in reaching out to patients who are both difficult to engage and difficult to treat.

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