

Local Health Integration Network

Mental health and addictions services removed from silos

Central LHIN providers work to develop comprehensive programs

Thursday March 20, 2008 -- Jason Thompson

Arla Hamer says a recent conference entitled "Strategies to Assist with Concurrent Disorders" is an exciting example of improvement happening in the Central Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) to help people overcome mental health and substance abuse issues.

Held in Markham and sponsored by Central LHIN and Addictions Services of York Region, the February conference attracted more than 150 people for a day of presentations and interactive workshops.

"This was an amazing opportunity to profile those initiatives and for people to have the opportunity to learn not only from the speakers, but to learn from one another," says Hamer, chair of the Central LHIN's Mental Health and Addictions Education Workgroup.

Hamer says the goal was for people to come away from the conference empowered and feeling like they have the necessary skill sets to help individuals who are struggling with concurrent disorders — in other words, people suffering from both mental health and substance abuse issues.

Tanya Shute, the executive director of The Krasman Centre, says the conference was symbolic of the recognition that mental health and addictions aren't silos anymore and that health service providers in both areas are dealing with the same clientele.

"We're saying that it's not up to the client anymore to bring the two systems together for their own plan," says Shute. "It's up to us to be able to have expertise in both and realize our limits and when we need to bring in the other systems."

Located in York Region, The Krasman Centre is a consumer survivor initiative governed and operated by people with experience in mental health or addictions systems.

While some presentations and workshops featured experts in the field talking about best practices, others focused on innovative approaches to deal with concurrent disorders in the Central LHIN.

An example of a leading edge approach to caring for those who have concurrent disorders is a partnership formed in November 2006 between the Canadian Mental Health Association, Humber River Regional Hospital and Reconnect Mental Health Services.

Through the partnership, the three organizations have put their heads together and have come up with an innovative way to treat concurrent disorders simultaneously without having to ask for more funding.

"I don't know that there's anything quite like it," Hamer says, adding that while the care component is evidenced based, the delivery model is innovative.

In the past, mental health and substance abuse issues would have been handled separately, but Hamer notes it's more effective to deal with them concurrently because of the interplay between the two. She says the partnership allows for this to happen.

Shute agrees the partnership is a great example of mental health and addictions services in the Central LHIN becoming more comprehensive.

She adds the level of devotion demonstrated by providers to improve service for people with concurrent disorders bodes well for future success.

"The Central LHIN is really lucky (because) there are a lot of health service providers out there at the top levels, executives and managers, who are really committed to being consumer survivor focused."

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