
Behavioral Health Network of Vermont Newsletter

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Successful BHN Training Conference Held on the Behavioral Health Needs of Returning Veterans and their Families

On January 30th, over 170 people attended BHN's second annual conference, *Serving Returning Veterans and Their Families*. Mental Health Commissioner Michael Hartman, VDH Deputy Commissioner Barbara Cimaglio, and Major General Michael Dubie all gave welcomes to those attending. Col. Jon Coffin – a 36 year employee of the HowardCenter, 36 year member of the National Guard, and current leader of the National Guard's debriefing team - provided opening remarks, noting that Vermont is bracing for the deployment of 1800-2000 soldiers in late 2009 or early 2010. Vermont has never faced such a large deployment.

Dr. Andrew Pomerantz, Chief of Mental Health Services at the White River Junction VA Medical Center, was the keynote speaker, and gave an overview of the impact of deployment on soldiers and their families, offered guidance about when to treat and when to refer, and addressed common dilemmas faced by mental health practitioners. Col. Dan Moriarty of the US Army Reserve provided an important overview of the Battlemind training that soldiers receive prior to deployment, and discussed its impact on these soldiers when they return home.



Top - from left to right: BHN Board President Linda Chambers, Col. Jon Coffin and Dr. Andy Pomerantz at the BHN conference; Below - Major General Michael Dubie welcomes those attending.

The most powerful part of the day was hearing from a panel of veterans and their families. They talked about their own experiences with deployment (and in many cases re-deployment) and participants included a mother of a soldier, two veterans, and two wives of veterans. This panel was facilitated by Daneen Roy of the Family Readiness Program of the VT National Guard.

The afternoon focused on services and resources currently available to assist veterans and their families, and also on important treatment issues in the deployment cycle such as Traumatic Brain Injury, Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, substance abuse and more.

“Feedback from those attending was extremely positive, and the event was highly successful in helping mental health clinicians - and many others in attendance - broaden their understanding of veterans and their families, and how they can help with pre and post deployment, as well as when a soldier is away,” said Traci Sawyers, BHN Director.

BHN is extremely grateful to the White River Junction VA Medical Center, Mental Health and Behavioral Sciences Service; the Vermont Department of Health/Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs; Vermont Department of Mental Health; and, the Military, Family and Community Network for their support and financial sponsorship of this event. Look for information about next year’s BHN conference this summer or fall - it will be held on January 29th, 2010.

New England Telehealth Consortium Closer to Implementation

In 2006, the Federal Communications Commission announced funding for what would be called the Rural Health Care Pilot program. This program was designed to create a nationwide broadband network of healthcare sites, subsidized at up to 85%. ProInfoNet in Maine submitted an application on behalf of 555 healthcare sites throughout northern New England. This signified the foundation for the New England Telehealth Consortium (NETC).

In late 2007, NETC received its requested funding amount of approximately \$24.7 million, representing the largest award of this type in the

country. This funding will be used to network member sites and greatly improve the capability and efficiency of healthcare in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont.

BHN is currently planning a telehealth initiative that will link member agencies and relevant partners, and enable both teleclinical services and distance learning. BHN was able to join the NETC this past fall, and therefore, the broadband costs of its teleclinical network will be reduced significantly. Several other important healthcare partners are part of the NETC as well, including community health centers, prisons, schools, state offices, hospitals and more.

According to Jim Rogers, President of ProInfoNet and founder of the consortium, the grant is “a huge step forward toward advanced healthcare technology in rural New England. It will be the least expensive way to bring telemedicine services to northern New England, since we now have both funding and buying power due to our large numbers and our ability to coordinate services through the New England Telehealth Consortium.”

Although there have been initial delays in the NETC implementation, the plan for build-out is now Fall of 2009 and BHN expects to start its build-out of member agency sites at the same time. The NETC will go far in making the wide spread use of cost effective telehealth technology a reality in New England, and will serve as an important model for the country as well.

BHN Network Development Update

BHN is just completing the first full year of its three year federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Rural Health Network Development grant, and much has been accomplished. We have nearly completed a strategic plan, and are beginning to draft a

BHN business plan. Buz Davis, a national consultant on network development, is assisting us with this process.

BHN's Telehealth Consultant, Mike Kasson, has made site visits to all of our member agencies and has drafted an initial plan and budget. We have just submitted a USDA Telemedicine and Distance Learning grant and if successful, that funding, combined with funding from HRSA, will allow us to begin the initial build-out of the BHN teleclinical network in the fall of 2009. Each BHN member agency and the BHN administrative office will have a dedicated telecommunications station connected to a dedicated BHN circuit.

Continued planning on the teleclinical and training component - and more - will continue to take place. The range of mental health services provided to rural consumers over a telehealth network is virtually limitless and includes all of the same services that can be provided in person and can be targeted to meet community needs. With the federal stimulus package and the strong focus on health IT, as well as with the launching of the New England Telehealth Consortium, this is a very exciting time, and BHN is well positioned to be a lead player in making telehealth a reality in Vermont.

BHN is also working with Dr. Craig Jones and the Blueprint Initiative related to the integration of behavioral health in that model. BHN has been asked to identify behavioral health services that should be available in communities, identify a national standard for care (eg. National Committee for Quality Assurance), and think about outcomes and new ways of paying for these services.

Finally, BHN is planning to respond to the mental health corrections services (inpatient) Request For Proposals which is scheduled to be issued this summer, and is already planning its next BHN annual conference.



FROM THE DIRECTOR

Things continue to be moving rapidly at BHN. Accomplishments during our first HRSA grant year have been significant, and have put us in a good position to take advantage of the federal and state work on health IT, larger health care reform efforts related to primary care and mental health integration and more.

These are challenging but hopeful times in that there may be a rare window of opportunity to change how health care is delivered - and it's critical that mental health is at the table and part of this vision and work.

Maureen Schake, BHN Project Coordinator, and BHN's three consultants: Buz Davis, Mike Kasson and Joy Livingston - have all contributed much to the work BHN has accomplished and to building our capacity as an organization and network. Many thanks also go to key partners - Barbara Cimaglio, Michael Hartman, Dr. Wendy Davis, Denis Barton, Hunt Blair, Dr. Craig Jones, Dr. Andy Pomerantz, Dr. D. Burroughs-Biron and many others - for their ongoing support of BHN as well.

I look forward to continued progress on BHN's current initiatives and more, as we focus on providing leadership for an integrated, consistently high quality statewide system of behavioral health services that are accessible to all Vermonters.

Check out the expanded BHN
website at:
www.bhnvt.org

Behavioral Health Network of Vermont, Inc. (BHN/VT) is a membership organization of the following community mental health agencies and providers throughout the state of Vermont:

Clara Martin Center

Counseling Service of Addison County

Health Care & Rehabilitation Services of Southeastern VT

HowardCenter

Lamoille County Mental Health Services

Northeast Kingdom Human Services, Inc

Northeastern Family Institute

Northwestern Counseling & Support Services, Inc

Rutland Mental Health Services

United Counseling Service of Bennington County

Washington County Mental Health Services



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