



Hope

NEWSLETTER

Keeping you updated on the news and celebrations of Catholic Charities

VOLUME 5 | SUMMER 2019

Integrating Mental and Physical Healthcare Reduces Barriers to Care

Benny J. was diagnosed with debilitating bipolar 1 disorder when he was 30 years old, but not before he had spent a decade on the street, attempting to self-medicate his symptoms away with alcohol and street drugs. In and out of jail, unable to hold down a job or find safe housing, Benny was referred to Catholic Charities in Wenatchee recently for evaluation, where he began to receive treatment for his diagnosis.

But Benny, now almost 40 years

old, had never seen a primary care physician and it was obvious to staff that not only was he suffering because of his mental illness, but his physical health was seriously compromised. Thanks to new healthcare services located at the Catholic Charities office, it was discovered that Benny was suffering from cirrhosis of the liver and Type 2 diabetes in addition to his bipolar disorder.

People suffering from mental illnesses like schizophrenia, serious depression and bipolar disorder, or

those being treated for substance use disorders, die on average 25 years earlier than the general public. They are not dying from their mental illness but from an undetected or undertreated physical illness.

“That is astonishing,” said Susan Marney, ARNP, Healthcare Services Supervisor. “Their mental health challenges are so complex that it creates barriers, making everything more difficult. Having a primary care office here on site just simplifies everything.”

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Integrated Healthcare | *continued from front page*

Mandate for Integration

Before this year, it would have been more difficult to receive the proper physical diagnosis and treatment for Benny and others like him.

Traditionally, behavioral and physical medicine have stayed in their respective “lanes” – with many of those with mental illness never

visiting a medical doctor. But, a 2018 mandate from Washington State now requires behavioral health services to partner with primary care providers to ensure that patients with mental, physical, and substance use disorders are treated holistically.

“Historically, mental health, substance use disorders, and physical healthcare services were delivered in different systems of care, making it difficult for patients to access all of the medical services and preventive care they needed,” Governor Jay Inslee said before signing the legislation, HB 1388. “Our state is moving quickly to integrate behavioral healthcare and physical healthcare

across the state, and we’re ready to make these agency structural changes right away.”

As a result of that legislation, Catholic Charities in Wenatchee has partnered with Columbia Valley Community Health (CVCH), to open an integrated healthcare clinic at the Worthen Street office. **Hope Healthcare** provides primary medical care, mental health services, and substance use disorder services for adults. That’s how Benny was able to see a medical provider quickly.

According to Jamie Hilliard, RN and mental health professional at Catholic Charities, 38% of the clients seen by the behavioral health staff have schizoaffective disorder. They are likely to develop another serious health condition such as heart attack, stroke, or cancer because of a combination of factors –higher-risk lifestyles, long-term antipsychotic drug use, and social disadvantage.



Richland Partnership Combines Substance Use and Behavioral Health Counseling

In Richland, Catholic Charities has partnered with Somerset Counseling, which has a 20-year history of providing outpatient drug and alcohol treatment in Eastern Washington. Samantha Spencer, a licensed mental health counselor at Catholic Charities, sees clients for behavioral health issues and is earning hours for her chemical dependency CDPT certification under the supervision of Somerset.

Samantha is a co-facilitator for a

co-occurring group at Somerset and sees clients in Yakima and Richland who are affected by both behavioral and substance use disorders. She believes that because substance use and mental health issues often go hand-in-hand, this partnership can break down barriers that clients may face with a dual-diagnosis.

“This partnership is important and necessary not only for the integrated, holistic care that Washington State is pushing

towards but because of the importance of integrative and holistic care to better serve clients,” she said. “When we have a client that we are already seeing it is much easier for them to access and understand what resources are out there. So, the partnership we’re creating is a way to streamline clients, to get them involved in substance use disorder services. Somerset also benefits from a quicker and easier referral process for their clients to receive mental health services.”

“So, the purpose of moving towards an integrated care model is to offer vulnerable people better care to prevent premature deaths,” she said.

The clinic includes a primary care provider from CVCH. All Catholic Charities’ adult clients are eligible to use the clinic. CVCH offers services on a sliding fee scale, helping to ensure that anyone who needs services will be able to access them.

The integrated clinic helps clients:

- Develop an individualized health action plan; and
- Improve the self-management of chronic conditions; and
- Ensure care coordination and care transitions.

Susan agrees with the legislation wholeheartedly, saying that this would have happened much earlier had support been available to move forward.

“We’ve always known it is better to treat mental and physical illnesses together. Anyone who works in either field has known that a division doesn’t make sense. But, until recently there weren’t the supports needed for integration,” she said. “Our behavioral health clientele has great needs and sometimes cannot easily navigate the complex larger healthcare networks. This on-site clinic allows our clients to get the care they need in a way that is more doable for them.”

“... people with chronic mental illness die 10-25 years before everyone else in our society, and they don’t die of mental illness.”

— Susan Marney ARNP, Healthcare Services Supervisor

Integrated healthcare is of great benefit for those who have a chronic mental illness by making sure they have access to healthcare of the same standard, quality, and range as other people. Developing effective screening could help them live a longer, more robust life. Benny is on his way to living a healthier lifestyle now that all of his medical issues – both mental and physical – are being properly addressed.

She believes that working with clients on both mental health and substance use disorders can be destigmatizing for the client and it’s been important to collaborate with her colleagues in the behavioral health field about substance abuse and how it manifests.

Kendra Palomarez, Catholic Charities’ Healthcare Transformation Director, agrees. “We’re learning so much more about substance use services here, and Samantha is able to make those connections and also be a consultant for the staff while she gains skills in chemical dependency treatment.”





Catholic Charities

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5301 Tieton Drive, Suite G
509.853.2800

Catholic Charities – Tri-Cities

2139 Van Giesen
509.946.4645

Catholic Charities – Wenatchee

145 South Worthen Street
509.662.6761

St. Vincent Centers and Food Bank – Union Gap

2629 Main Street
509.457.5111

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*Motivated by Christ's love,
we bring hope to life,
especially for those most in
need.*

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Vision

We envision communities where people are treated with dignity and respect, their basic needs are met, and they are empowered to enhance the quality of their own lives.

Values

- We affirm our faith in God who calls us to serve.
- We celebrate the uniqueness and dignity of people.
- We nurture children and strengthen families.
- We provide quality services to those in need.
- We serve people of all faiths.