



Office Hours: Open call for approaches supporting individuals with alcohol use disorder and other complex needs

December 2019

Presenters:

- Dede de Percin, Executive Director, Mile High Health Alliance
- Frederick Rotgers, psychologist
- Martina Schulte, doctor of internal medicine and former Chair of the High Needs Patients Workgroup of Mile High Health Alliance

Session description:

Substance use disorder has received increased public attention due to rising rates of opioid-related overdose deaths and misuse of prescription opioids. While opioid use disorder is an important issue, alcohol use disorder can also be a significant contributor to individuals' complex health and social needs, due in no small part to alcohol's legal status, social acceptance, and wide availability. Individuals who accrue the highest medical expenditures are more likely to use or be dependent on alcohol. This type of substance use disorder can impact one's ability to find and maintain housing and employment, manage chronic conditions, and maintain interpersonal relationships. Alcohol also has far greater secondary harm to others than other addictions.

In January's Office Hours session, we welcomed Frederick Rotgers, psychologist, Dede de Percin, Executive Director of the **Mile High Health Alliance (MHHA)**, and Marti Schulte, doctor of internal medicine and former Chair of the **High Needs Patients Workgroup of MHHA** to discuss alcohol use disorder in individuals with complex needs. Fred described national and international approaches on the issue; Dede provided an overview of the **MHHA** followed up by Marti who presented the **High Needs Patients Workgroup of MHHA**, describe the group's case study of alcohol use, and potential steps. The majority of the session consisted of a peer discussion and an open call for participants' insights. Attendees were encouraged to share about their respective programs and approaches to alcohol use disorder in individuals with complex needs.

Session description:

Office Hours

1. **What services does MHHA provide to people with complex needs?**

The **MHHA** is a Regional Accountable Entity, a coalition of providers and does not provide direct services. **MHHA** members range from small non-federally qualified community health centers to big health and hospital systems, including the primary safety net hospital, Denver Health. One of the roles of the Regional Accountable Entity is to coordinate payment and delivery of services between the different provider organizations.

Expert highlights:

- Harm reduction approaches should be considered along with abstinence-based interventions
- Addressing alcohol misuse requires universal screening in healthcare settings, mandating treatment programs provide empirically supported treatments like medication-assisted treatment, and addressing stigma and cost.
- Housing can be a key factor in recovery so assistance should not be contingent upon abstinence.

2. **What are some ways to apply harm reduction approaches with individuals with alcohol use disorder?**

Presenters described the increasing the willingness of providers to use moderation as a viable option for patients experiencing addiction. The United States tends to be less accommodating to harm reduction approaches than other countries, including medicated addiction treatment.

A significant number of individuals experiencing homelessness also have alcohol use disorder making the harm reduction approach of Housing First particularly important. These evidence-based practices can be helpful for many individuals for whom abstinence is not a viable endpoint.

3. **What services are provided to groups that meet the criteria of housing instability, behavioral health diagnoses, and alcohol as the primary substance abuse?**

A number of the **High Needs Patients Workgroup** member organizations connected their clients with long-term residential addiction treatment. **Denver Health**, the local safety net system, provides integrated services and operates nine community health centers located across the city. The health centers now have behavioral health services on site and substance use counselors or screeners on site at almost every facility. As a result, the opportunities to screen for and provide addiction treatment have increased dramatically.

4. **What has been the local community's response to alcohol harm reduction approaches in Denver, Colorado?**

In the last couple years, people are starting to talk more about the harm of alcohol use disorder and the recent passage of a sizable sales tax indicates that the residents of the city and county of Denver are willing to dedicate funding to this issue. With Housing First there's been a big movement toward getting away from sobriety in order to qualify.

Sample references

1. Wakeman, S. Medications for addiction treatment: changing language to improve care. *Journal of Addiction Medicine*. Available at: https://journals.lww.com/journaladdictionmedicine/Abstract/2017/02000/Medications_For_Addiction_Treatment__Changing.1.aspx. Published February 2017. Accessed August 13, 2019.
2. State of New Jersey Department of Health. NJ Opioid Data Dashboard, Drug Related Deaths in New Jersey. Available at: https://www.state.nj.us/health/populationhealth/opioid/opioid_deaths.shtml. Accessed August 13, 2019.
3. New Jersey Office of the Attorney General. NJ CARES New Jersey 2019 Suspected Overdose Deaths. Available at: <https://www.njcares.gov/pdfs/2019-NJ-Suspected-Overdose-Deaths-06.30.19.pdf>. Accessed August 13, 2019.

About the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers

We are a multidisciplinary nonprofit working to improve care for people with complex health and social needs in Camden, NJ, and across the country. The Camden Coalition works to advance the field of **complex care** by implementing person-centered programs and piloting new models that address chronic illness and social barriers to health and wellbeing. Supported by a robust data infrastructure, cross-sector convening, and shared learning, our community-based programs deliver better care to the most vulnerable individuals **in Camden** and **regionally**.

Through our **National Center for Complex Health and Social Needs** (National Center), the Camden Coalition's local work also informs our goal of building the field of complex care **across the country**. Launched in 2016, the National Center exists to inspire people to join the complex care community, connect complex care practitioners with each other, and support the field with tools and resources that move the field of complex care forward.

For more information about the Camden Coalition, visit www.camdenhealth.org.