

Outpatient Psychiatric Services Available in the East Bay

Summarized by Thomas T. Thomas

Finding a good program for your friend or family member with a mental illness is a major concern. Two programs in the East Bay have been especially well received. At our January 28, 2004, meeting we heard from **Roslyn Head-Lyons, LCSW**, Program Specialist, Outpatient Psychiatric Services, Highland Campus of the Alameda County Medical Center, Oakland, and from **Frances Onia** and **Jenev Vahe**, Mental Health Specialists, Pathways to Wellness Medication Clinic, also in Oakland.

Highland Campus

Roslyn Head-Lyons has been with the Alameda County Medical Center for 18 years and has worked as assessment coordinator for Highland Campus outpatient services for the past 18 months. Their programs are open to anyone with an Access I psychiatric diagnosis (e.g., bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, schizo-affective disorder, major depression) and coverage under Medicare and Medi-Cal. Head-Lyons' "catchment area" for Highland Campus, located at 1411 East 31st Street in Oakland, is Alameda to Hercules. The sister Fairmont Campus, located at 15400 Foothill Boulevard in San Leandro, offers similar programs and covers patients from San Leandro to Pleasanton with community liaison by Kyletta Sanchez-Turner.



ROSLYN HEAD-LYONS, LCSW

The campus offers a full day program, five days a week, starting at 9:50 a.m. and ending at 2:50 p.m. With snacks and a hot meal, clients can attend up to four group sessions, all of which are coeducational:

- **Illness Management**—where the client comes to understand his or her psychiatric disorder, deals with symptoms, and learns how medications work and about their side effects.
- **Functional Skills**—which teaches techniques for coping with daily living, including communication, personal interaction, stress management, conflict management, and hygiene.
- **Process**—for dealing with day to day challenges and successes.

- Dual Diagnosis—a small subgroup for clients who are also dealing with alcohol and drug abuse.

The program is offered in English, although Highland Campus has access to the county's translation services. The hospital is also looking at starting a group for family members and primary support people. Interested parties may tour the facility after 3 p.m., when clients have left, in order to maintain confidentiality.

The treatment team includes therapists and psychiatrists who are individually assigned to the client, a program nurse, and an activities coordinator who arranges stimulating events such as dance contests, talent shows, picnics, art projects, and holiday festivities.

"We offer two levels of service," Head-Lyons said. "Partial hospitalization is for clients with more intensive needs. They attend five times a week for approximately four months, and take all three main groups. With time, the person can graduate to outpatient services, attending three days a week and taking two groups. Outpatient services are also for about four months, although the person may move on into vocational rehabilitation training during that time."

The goal of the psychiatric staff is to see partially hospitalized clients at least once a week, and outpatients at least every two weeks. "The program has a total capacity of 90 people," she said. "Right now, we have ten to twelve people in partial hospitalization and 54 to 55 in outpatient services. So we're always looking for new referrals."

Clients range in age from 18 to the mid-60s, but currently Highland's clients are mostly young women, with the average age of 40. There are no limitations on the kinds of medication the client may be using. Head-Lyons does screen for indications of violence, which is not allowed in the program. She takes referrals from the John George Psychiatric Pavilion, other hospitals, board and care facilities, nursing homes, case managers, and families.

The Highland Campus runs three vans—from East Oakland, West Oakland, and Berkeley-Richmond—and the drivers will call a new client before pickup. The program is wheelchair accessible; although the vans are not, the hospital coordinates with Alameda County Paratransit for service to the disabled.

"We have a lot to offer," Head-Lyons said. "Snacks, a hot meal, graduation ceremonies, certificates of accomplishment—and no waiting list."

Pathways to Wellness

The program offers an outpatient psychiatric clinic with medication monitoring by seven psychiatrists. New patients are referred by Alameda Access (800-491-9099), which is the Alameda County Medical Center's single point for Medicare-based referrals. However, Pathways to Wellness also



FRANCES ONIA

supports clients on private insurance as well as Medicare and Medi-Cal. The client first comes in for a two-hour intake process, which includes an hour for taking a medical history with the mental health specialists, Frances Onia and Jenev Vahe, followed by an hour of psychiatric evaluation. The treatment teams meet once a week to discuss new patients.

After intake, the client makes monthly appointments with the psychiatrist to check up on his or her medication. The service thus replaces use of a

private psychiatrist or other outpatient clinics for high-functioning individuals with Access I disorders. Pathways to Wellness will call the client with a reminder the day before an appointment and will make a follow-up call for missed appointments. Clients who miss appointments can also use the drop-in clinic, which is open on Thursday. The program has a pharmacy on site, with medications paid for by Medi-Cal.



JENEV VAHE

“The patient always sees the same psychiatrist,” Vahe said. “We have both child and adult psychiatrists, and many of them have private practices or are affiliated with institutions such as the University of California, San Francisco, and UCLA.” The Oakland office also has two therapists on staff and is starting to offer group sessions, including a woman’s group every Monday.

The Oakland office, located at 411 30th Street, Suite 314, serves approximately 1400 clients from Berkeley, Oakland, and San Leandro. The Union City office, located at 1328 Decoto Road, Suite 124, serves an additional 1200 to 1300 clients from Hayward, Newark, and Fremont. Pathways to Wellness offers on-site language support in Punjabi, Hindi, Tagalog, and Spanish and is wheelchair accessible.

“Our mission,” Onia said, “is to provide quality care to people and treat them with respect.”