



CONNECTING

Creating A New Mental Health Service Delivery System for Our City

March 1-15, 2003

Access HelpLine Operates As Region Shuts Down

When the District, like the rest of the regional community was running for cover against a record-setting snowstorm, the telephone calls kept coming into the Department's Access HelpLine. They slowed a bit, but averaged at least 10 to 12 calls an hour. Yet, in face of the persistent storm, the Access HelpLine staff responded with its trademark precision.

"The dedication of this team is a source of pride," says Mental Health Director Martha B. Knisley. "The staff knew people would be calling for all kind of assistance. That's why it was important to be on duty, alert and ready to serve. That's the meaning of year-round service, regardless of the season or the hour," the Director said.

Ms. Knisley also pointed out that when the snowstorm hit town, the Access HelpLine staff, like the rest of the Department, was already geared up to provide extensive outreach to individuals and families wrestling with emotional feelings in connection with the heightened terrorist alert plaguing the nation.

She says the agency owes a dept of gratitude to Jana Berhow, a clinical supervisor, who coordinated around-the-clock shift changes and to Kerima A. Gibbons who furnished home cooked meals and hot beverages, taking care of a basic need of a staff virtually snowed-bounded to the whims of mother nature.

Another much needed task was handled by John Gibbons, who willingly crisscrossed snow-laden streets in his 4-wheeler, faring workers to and from work. Gibbons is a supervisor in the division of certification of the Department's Office of Accountability, another section of the agency with responsibilities that defy weather conditions.

Director Says DMH Is Ready to Help

Snowstorms and heightened terrorist alerts are at the top of things Mental Health Director Martha B. Knisley is talking about around the city. When it comes

her turn to speak at neighborhood meetings Mayor Anthony A. Williams is holding to brief the community about steps to consider



Martha B. Knisley, Director, DC Department of Mental Health

for emergency situations, the Mental Health Director uses every occasion to let residents know the Department is ready to help. From extreme weather conditions to concerns about terrorism, the Director says the Department is prepared to help residents cope.

"Call us," she told a large gathering of residents at the first neighborhood cluster meeting for emergency preparedness held at the Washington Plaza Hotel on Thomas Circle, NW. "Call our 24-Hour Access HelpLine or walk into one of our neighborhood-

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What's Fair?

New Grievance System Has the Answer

The District's new mental health system is committed to fairness in every aspect of its operation. To make good on that commitment, DMH has created a new grievance program called FAIR. This name spells out the program's fundamental premise: Finding Answers, Improving Relationships, which will ensure the system promotes consumers' recovery.

The Department expects to roll out the program in mid-March. At that time, consumers may appeal to the FAIR program any grievances that have not been mutually resolved by their providers. The new program also requires providers to develop grievance procedures that must be approved by the Department prior to their implementation.

FAIR will be a part of the operational structure of the newly restructured Office of Consumer and Family Affairs. Once fully in place, FAIR will provide a systematic way for consumers to file grievances and monitor progress toward their resolution. There are identified timelines and steps DMH and certified service providers will have to adhere to ensure that services are indeed meeting consumers' and their families' expectations.

Getting Ready for HIPAA

Training Program Starts Soon

Isn't it convenient to be able to use ATMs all across the country and know federal law protects your privacy? Well, the privacy of your health records soon will receive similar protection under the federal law called HIPAA, which stands for Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996. It requires organizations involved in health care to adhere to new national standards around how patient information is collected, used, stored, exchanged and protected. It also mandates specific standards for billing and receiving payment for health care services.

To make sure that the Department is in compliance with the mandates of the new law, training is being developed for employees with access to consumers' health records. Training will be announced soon, so keep watching this space.

Sobering Station

Proving Effective

The city's first sobering station has made a difference in the lives of more than 150 homeless since its doors opened last fall. For the first time, homeless individuals who have consumed excessive amounts of alcohol or other kinds of drugs have a place to gain immediate assistance and medical attention.

This new initiative primarily targets individuals languishing in the streets on heat ducts, on park benches and in abandoned houses. Once they check in at a sobering station, a whole new range of mental health services, including evaluations and health screenings come into play. The new sobering station, with support from the Addiction Prevention and Recovery Services Administration of the Department of Health, is operating out of Building 12, the general detoxification facility, at D.C. General Hospital.

Substance Abuse & Mental Illness

Register Now for April 30 Conference

This year's one-day learning conference, co-sponsored by DMH and the Mayor's State Mental Health Planning Council, will feature "The Road to Recovery: Mental Illness and Substance Abuse." The conference is Wednesday, April 30, 2003 and will be held at the Renaissance Washington DC Hotel, 999 Ninth Street, NW, across from the Washington Convention Center. The conference is open to the public, but pre-registration is encouraged.

Open discussions and formal presentations will focus on the co-occurrence of substance abuse and mental health across the life span. Those interested in attending should contact conference organizers: Dr. Juanita Reaves at (202) 673-4311, juanita.reaves@dc.gov or Leonard Higgs at (202) 673-4551, leonard.higgs@dc.gov.

Saint Elizabeths Hospital: A Long & Proud History

The long and proud history of Saint Elizabeths Hospital will continue to evolve with the construction of a new hospital building.



Architectural rendering of new Saint Elizabeths Hospital Building

The new building will be developed on the east side of the Saint Elizabeths campus, which has been a standout landmark in the culturally rich Anacostia community since the hospital was established in 1855. The new hospital building is designed in the stately tradition of many of the original buildings that date back to the 1800s through the early 1900's, when the hospital complex served thousands of individuals at any given time.

For many years now, the number of individuals living and receiving acute mental health care at the hospital on a permanent basis has steadily declined from 7,000 ten years ago to about 500 today. New medications and advancements in treatment options now make it possible for people to receive effective mental health care in community settings as opposed to more restrictive facilities like a hospital. This makes it a lot easier for individuals to assume a greater role in their own recovery and it also allows greater opportunity for family members and others to support their recovery efforts.

When the new hospital is ready for occupancy, it will allow staff and treatment teams to fully adopt new

patterns of care that are proving to be effective in other urban communities that have adapted their mental health facilities in recent years. The new Saint Elizabeths Hospital building will have space for 300 plus beds, which mirrors the declining need.

However, the new construction plans include the renovation of three existing buildings, which will make additional bed and treatment space available if needed in future years. These buildings are in close proximity to the site that will accommodate the new hospital. The new hospital site will be conveniently located near the Congress Heights Metro station at Alabama Avenue, SE.

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Director Says DMH is Ready to Help

based centers, we have trained counselors and support staff who will help you develop coping skills to deal with unusual situations.”

In addition to Mayor Williams, the neighborhood meetings include the participation of the directors of the city's Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Health. DMH managers and employees are welcome to join Director Knisley at the meetings to promote the Department's services. The next scheduled meeting is from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Monday, March 10 at River Terrace School, 34th and Dix Sts, NE. The series also include meetings from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. on Wednesday, March 12, at St. Georges Episcopal Church, 160 U St., NW; and from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 19, at the headquarters of the Emergency Management Agency, located on the eighth floor of the Reeves Municipal Center, 2000 14th St., NW.

Due to inclement weather, two meetings were postponed and will be rescheduled. They will take place at the Allen Chapel AME church on Alabama Ave., SE and at the River Park Mutual Homes Community Center, on Delaware Ave., SW.

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When You Need to Talk, We'll Listen

24-Hour Access HelpLine
1-888-7WE-HELP (1-888-793-4357)

TDD Access HelpLine
(202) 673-7500

Government of the District of Columbia
Anthony A. Williams, Mayor



Department of Mental Health
Martha B. Knisley, Director