

DUAL DIAGNOSIS:
A CRITICAL
CHALLENGE
DRIVES INNOVATIVE
PROGRAM DESIGN

IMPACT SERVICES CORPORATION
VA HOMEWARD BOUND CONFERENCE SAN DIEGO, CA
OCTOBER 2007

What is Dual Diagnosis?

Also commonly known as co-occurring disorder, dual diagnosis is a profoundly debilitating condition that exists among a very large number of homeless veterans. DDX is typically characterized by a serious mental health diagnosis that exists in conjunction with continuous drug abuse and/or full blown addiction that consistently produces a destructive loss in quality of life.

When not properly treated, DDX can potentially become life threatening and possibly cause premature death from continuous self-abuse.

NEED FOR DDX PROGRAM DEMONSTRATED

- Dual Diagnosis Symptoms can very often combine extreme despair/hopelessness with depression or other serious mental health symptoms and possibly result in various forms of self-harm including overdose and death.
- Currently about 50% of all homeless vets in our homeless programs suffer from DDX. This number has grown dramatically by about 20% in the past 3 years.
- While sometimes difficult to diagnosis, treatment can be aggressively undertaken through the effective utilization of intensive in-patient psychotherapy, modern pharmaceutical regimens, and long-term out-patient programs and clinical support services. The DDX program at Impact works to prepare the at-risk veteran for life after homelessness with the ultimate goal of eventual self-sufficiency and independent living by dealing with the life long problems associated with DDX.

Evolution of DDX/Grant and Per Diem Program

- Impact Service's principal veteran target group demonstrates a long-term established statistical history of a homeless population that gradually grows to exceed 40% DDX over the last 14 Years.
- Early transitional program (2001) put in place for at-risk veterans with a period of sobriety under 30 days after short-term in-patient program discharge from VISN4 VAMCs.
- HUD/VA/Impact explore the cost and benefit of aggressively partnering with VISN4 VAMC's SAT/DOM units to identify DDX candidates for the program.
- Impact invited to consider partnering a grant and per-diem program with the PVAMC to specifically house DDX population. Expanded program opens in 2004.
- Program specifically designed to work in conjunction with VISN 4 VAMCs.
- Multi-layered program promotes stability and long-term recovery.
- Graduation from early program give vets solid footing for placement in the late transitional program.

THE TWO FOLD PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

Teamwork

Aggressive partnering, including on-site regional outreach, with VAMC DOM and SAT units in VISN4 makes it possible for Philadelphia area veterans with DDX to be placed in an environment designed to address both their addiction and mental health issues. Comprehensive discharge planning is an absolute must between partner organizations.

Communication and Cooperation

Daily contact maintained between Behavioral Health/ ARU personnel and Impact Services staff ensures the vet is focused and understands what is needed for a gradual and successful reintegration into the community. Open dialogue between organizations to interject whatever strategy best fits veterans during out-patient support phase.

DDX Non-clinical Supportive Services

- Short and Long-term recovery plan
- Drug testing compliance
- Out-patient transportation plan
- Individual service strategy
- Personal/Legal/Financial assistance
- Employment development plan
- Employment transportation plan
- Mandatory savings plan
- Court probation compliance plan
- Community Reintegration plan

DDX Clinical Supportive Services

- Interview and clinical assessment of referral
- Treatment planning management (out-patient)
- Treatment support counseling
- Recovery support counseling
- Group therapy (interactive)
- Individual (one-on-one) counseling
- Out-patient psychiatric case management/referrals
- Referrals to additional out-patient treatment
- Crisis intervention/management
- Updated psycho/socials with clinical/medical records on-site recycle continuing treatment, psychiatric, and medical data.
- Enrollment referrals to VAMC in-patient SAT, ARU, PTSD, ETC.
- Treatment and Sobriety Contract

DDX REQUIREMENTS EMPLOYMENT TRACK

- Desire to work in full-time employment
- Documented sobriety in excess of 90 days
- Successful completion of VAMC in-patient treatment program
- Demonstrate mental stability to handle employment
- Demonstrate physical ability to work
- Goal – Independence and self-sufficiency earning a wage that will support sober/stable lifestyle

DDX REQUIREMENTS NON-WORK TRACK

- Clinical documentation that the veteran is not capable of working (psycho/social history, etc.)
- Processing of eligibility for SSI, SSD, pension, or compensation for benefits income
- Mandatory savings program for future self-sufficiency
- Goal – stability, sobriety, and productive behavior

GROWING NEED

- Impacts DDX is the only program in our geographical coverage area of 6 states and 10 VAMC facilities that is specifically designed to serve DDX veterans.
- A program expansion of 133% is scheduled for completion in 2008 to service a total of 56 vets at any one time.
- Impact anticipates the number of DDX enrollments to increase by an additional 12-15% by 2010.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Impact's experience clearly shows that veterans diagnosed with DDX represent the largest single group of homeless veterans that are prone to relapse, have the greatest potential for self-harm, and that are chronically homeless for long periods of time.
- During the first year of operation Impact projected it would serve 50 veterans in the DDX program. The final number served during that first year was 79 (58%) more than initially projected.
- Partnership with VAMC's is absolutely necessary to identify, interview, discharge plan, and successfully enroll potential program participants.
- It is not possible to accept DDX referrals over the phone from in-patient facilities due to the multi-dimensional complexities of co-occurring disorders. On-site outreach has been shown to be the most effective for recruitment.