

# National Council

M A G A Z I N E

*A quarterly publication from the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare*

## Treating Addiction Disorders

### Addictions Treatment: Still Limited After All These Years

*Linda Rosenberg says we can win the fight for parity only if the addictions and mental health advocacy communities fight together. • page 1*

### Addictions Treatment Pays

*Steve Belenko demonstrates how addictions treatment yields net economic benefits to society • page 3*

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*Kathleen Sciacca explores collaborative treatment interventions that concur with the client's readiness level. • page 22*

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FOR COMMUNITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE

*Healthy Minds. Strong Communities.*

# Measuring Outcomes Enhances Addictions Treatment Access and Retention

Maureen Fitzgerald, Editor, Network for the Improvement of Addiction Treatment

In response to increased demands for accountability and performance measures in addictions treatment, states and providers are turning to process improvement strategies to improve both treatment services and the bottom line. Since 2003, members of the Network for the Improvement of Addiction Treatment (NIATx) have demonstrated how process improvement can make a significant difference in the way agencies provide care,

and the way states and providers can forge partnerships to improve service delivery.

A new NIATx initiative, Strengthening Treatment Access and Retention—State Implementation (STAR-SI), funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s Center for Substance Abuse Treatment and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, promotes state-level implementation of process improvement methods to

improve access to and retention in outpatient addictions treatment.

Since October 2006, STAR-SI grantees have received funding to implement process improvement strategies targeting fiscal, regulatory, and policy changes. In each pilot state, the Single State Substance Abuse Authority Director and a designated state team change leader work in partnership with managed behavioral health organizations, state provider associations, NIATx treatment providers, and other stakeholders to develop provider learning networks and pilot improvements to get more people into treatment and keep them there longer.

The NIATx model of process improvement relies on collecting and measuring data to quantify the impact of change. Measuring the impact of change enhances process improvement efforts by

- a. *Identifying which changes worked.*
- b. *Understanding which changes resulted in the most significant improvement.*
- c. *Providing feedback/reinforcement to the team.*

Collecting and measuring performance outcomes are key components of the STAR-SI initiative. Dr. Jay Ford, Chief Research Officer for NIATx, suggests that a performance management system can also serve as a mechanism to provide feedback to providers and use newly established learning communities to support the ongoing dissemination of knowledge. “Such systems help agencies learn from each other and then leverage the knowledge to move more toward a culture of improvement within the organization,” Dr. Ford says.

The State of Maine was inspired to apply for the STAR-SI project by the success a Maine provider — The Acadia Hospital in Bangor — experienced as a participant in an earlier

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## Acadia Measures How Process Improvement Affects Patient Outcomes

One process improvement project at The Acadia Hospital in Bangor, Maine, measured how NIATx process improvements affected patient outcomes. Acadia Hospital was using the BASIS-24 questionnaire in all of its mental health and substance abuse inpatient and outpatient programs to measure client functioning at time of admission and again at either mid-treatment or discharge to assess treatment outcomes.

“We realized that we had the opportunity to use BASIS-24 to find out if patients still got better after we implemented the NIATx changes that reduced waiting times and increased admissions,” says Dr. David Prescott, Director of Psychology Services and Clinical Research for The Acadia Hospital. One of those changes was to increase the use of group

therapy, rather than individual therapy, as the primary emphasis of treatment for the majority of clients.

“Moving to more group therapy freed up counselor time to complete intakes,” explains Prescott. “Yet staff were concerned that the outpatient group therapy would not be as effective as the individual therapy. They couldn’t argue that we were seeing more patients, but they could question whether those patients were getting the treatment they needed.”

The BASIS questionnaire results showed that by their own reporting, patients got a lot better — even with the change from individual to group therapy. “Sharing the BASIS results with staff proved the effectiveness of the NIATx process changes,” Prescott says.



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NIATx program, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Paths to Recovery. Acadia’s process improvement efforts improved on each of the four NIATx aims: reduce waiting times, reduce no-shows, increase admissions, and increase continuation. With increased admissions, Acadia increased billable hours, which in turn increased revenue and enhanced its profit margin. Maine’s STAR-SI project is unique in focusing on a common goal and outcome across the 10 participating providers. The project is also pilot testing the use of the Maine Association of Substance Abuse Providers website ([www.masap.org](http://www.masap.org)) to disseminate knowledge to participating treatment providers.

Working together to remove barriers and create incentives to improve treatment access, Maine’s Office of Substance Abuse and participating providers will promote continuous process improvement across delivery systems, says Kimberly Johnson, Director of the Office of Substance Abuse for Maine’s Department of Health and Human Services. “We’ve seen how the NIATx

model has changed the way providers work, and the STAR-SI project will help Maine transform the way treatment services are delivered across our state.”

*Maureen Fitzgerald is an editor for the NIATx National Program Office in Madison, Wisconsin. NIATx — Network for the Improvement of Addiction Treatment — is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment’s Strengthening Treatment Access and Retention program, and a number of independent addiction treatment organizations. NIATx serves as a unique “learning collaborative” to improve access to and retention in addiction treatment. Treatment organizations joining the initiative learn how to make improvements in their day-to-day practices to serve their clients more efficiently and appropriately based on their individual needs.*

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