Improving Efficiency and Effectiveness of Addiction Treatment through Business Process Improvement

Treatment Access and Retention Need Improvement

Every year more than 19 million Americans are in need of addiction treatment, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, but only 25% of those individuals are able to access treatment. Of those who do access services, 50% drop out without completing treatment. For some the issue is finances, for others the issue is readiness, but often the real issue keeping patients from treatment is the way that services are delivered – and this is what each NIATx organization is addressing in order to improve treatment services.

Barriers to treatment can be reduced by improving organizational processes, which can, in turn, reduce duplications of work, get rid of processes that no longer work, and increase the chances that processes work right the first time. These improvements can reduce frustration, not only for patients who need care, but also for the administrators, clinicians and staff who are trying to help them receive the care they need – when they need it, for as long as they need it.

The purpose of NIATx, therefore, is to help treatment programs nationwide identify and improve the work practices, policies and processes that can positively impact their ability to get patients in the door and keep them in treatment long enough to make a meaningful difference.

Process Improvement is Effective in Improving Access and Retention

Process Improvement has long been a successful tool in many industries, and in recent years "the Toyota model" has become a movement within the healthcare field. NIATx is using Process Improvement methodology to assist addiction treatment providers in making better use of their limited resources, and is finding that the field is not only receptive to Process Improvement theories and practices, but is exceptionally successful in using such tools to increase access to and retention in treatment as well as improve organizational bottom lines. Some of the innovations NIATx member agencies have been implementing to achieve their aims include:

Reduce Waiting Times:
- Cross-train Staff
- Streamline Intake Process
- On-demand Scheduling
- Walk-in Appointments
- Double Booking
- Initial Client Engagement

Reduce No-Shows:
- Reminder Calls
- Next Day or Walk-in Appointments
- Case Management
- Transportation
- Client Rewards
- Client Transfer Process

Reduce Waiting & No-Shows • Increase Admissions & Continuation

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Increase Admissions:
- Targeted Marketing
- Pre-admission Engagement
- Reminder Phone Calls
- Orientation Groups
- Central Intake
- Expanded Capacity

Increase Continuation:
- Case Management
- Staff Training in Contingency Management
- Individualized Treatment Plans
- Special Groups for Specific Client Needs
- Client Rewards
- Use of PDSA Cycles with Clients

States are Key to Diffusing Process Improvement

Addiction treatment providers within NIATx have proven the effectiveness of Process Improvement in increasing access to and retention in treatment; now the question is how to increase the effectiveness of these tools while disseminating NIATx best practices throughout the addiction treatment field. The *NIATx State Pilot Project* is 1) identifying how states can exercise leadership roles to improve treatment quality; 2) using demonstrated Process Improvement methods to design and test how states and other payers can work together with providers to improve access and retention in addiction treatment; and 3) documenting and disseminating innovative practices used by states and payers in collaboration with treatment providers to improve quality performance.

State process improvement teams can impact provider access and retention practices through a variety of methods. Examples of methods that states are using to enhance treatment quality include: amending requirements on providers that act as barriers to access and retention; providing incentives for increasing access and retention; altering accreditation or licensure requirements; and providing technical assistance.

States can have a profound impact on addiction treatment performance. By leveraging their role as major purchasers of addiction treatment services, states can spread practices that improve access and retention as well as guide performance improvement. Through this initiative NIATx is demonstrating how states can substantially improve the performance of their provider networks.

For More Information on NIATx

NIATx maintains a thorough website which is used as a resource to the addiction treatment community. The website provides resources that can help addiction treatment agencies make organizational changes to improve their clients' access to and retention in treatment as well as resources that demonstrate that such changes make good business sense. In addition to articles on Process Improvement, the website offers a toolbox, containing tools to guide organizations through improvement projects, change ideas and best practices from NIATx members implementing organizational changes, and a resource center for further information about publications, presentations, and additional online resources. Please check the website, www.NIATx.net, for regular updates, and to sign up for the monthly NIATx E-News.

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