

Increasing Continuation

The Women's Alliance for Strengthening Access and Retention (WASTAR) and STEP 2 of Reno, Nevada

This case study describes methods STEP 2 of Reno, Nevada, used to increase completion rates at the intensive outpatient (IOP) and outpatient (OP) programs. The organization used workforce development and therapeutic engagement to increase attendance at the first four sessions from 83% to 100% and the overall treatment completion rate from 85% to 90%. STEP 2 applied the same changes to both IOP and OP treatment processes; therefore, the information and data contained in this case study apply to both.

Aim: increase continuation rates in the IOP and OP programs

Paths: contingency management (for staff), therapeutic engagement, scheduling

Key words: continuation, executive sponsor, change team, change leader, aim, workforce development

Jamie's story

Jamie was only 22 but her life had become a downward spiral of domestic abuse and addiction to methamphetamine. She feared that she would lose both her three-year-old son and the baby she was expecting in three months because of her drug addiction. The Department of Social Services reminded her of that often. One fateful rainy day Jamie looked for help in the telephone book and found STEP 2, a program that provides addiction treatment services to women. The program's treatment plans also include prenatal care, parenting classes, and children's services.

STEP 2 is a member of the Network for the Improvement of Addiction Treatment (NIATx). As a partnership between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Paths to Recovery program, the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment's Strengthening Treatment Access and Retention (STAR) program, and a number of independent addiction treatment organizations, NIATx works with addiction treatment providers to make more efficient use of their capacity and share strategies and tools for improving access and retention.

STEP 2 had decided to make changes to increase rates of treatment continuation. By gathering information from counselors and then providing them with training and tools to do their jobs better, the agency was able to create an atmosphere more conducive to treatment success. STEP 2 provides all counselors with weekly education sessions on topics such as effective treatment plans, crisis management, and discharge planning. Agency staff designed these sessions to increase the counselors' knowledge base and provide them information about resources available in their community. With the combination of treatment and support that STEP 2 gave her, Jamie was able to turn her life around.

Background

STEP 2 of Reno, Nevada, provides addiction treatment services to women 18 years of age and older. Many of the program's clients have children or are pregnant. When STEP 2 became a member of the Network for the Improvement of Addiction Treatment (NIATx), they identified timeliness and continuation as two areas for improvement. Shortly after joining NIATx in the spring of 2004, STEP 2 hired a new executive sponsor and clinical director. The new management offered the agency and change team clear direction, along with a mission and a vision to increase outpatient continuation rates.

STEP 2 provides outpatient services to approximately 110 women annually. Those women are seeking treatment for addiction to substances such as methamphetamine, marijuana, cocaine, and alcohol. IOP and OP programming at STEP 2 consists of a combination of individual and group sessions.

Setting the aim

Patients who attend their first four treatment sessions are most likely to complete a beneficial degree of treatment. A review of the continuation rates in the IOP and OP programs at STEP 2 indicated that approximately 83% of women entering treatment

attended all of the first four scheduled units of service. About 85% completed IOP or OP treatment through to discharge. The change team set an aim to:

Increase IOP and OP continuation rates for the first four units of service and for overall treatment completion.

Deciding what to change

Before the first change team meeting, the change leader, Michelle Stupfel, distributed a staff satisfaction survey with four questions: 1) What do you enjoy the most about your job? 2) What frustrates you the most about your position? 3) What tools or training do you feel you need in order to be more effective in your job? 4) Do you need anything other than tools or training to be effective in your job?

The results of the survey indicated that employees felt that they needed more training and education to do their jobs better. The clinical director also conducted staff evaluations and found that staff needed additional training in several areas.

After reviewing the survey and evaluation results, the change team discussed the importance of staff training in delivering quality services to STEP 2's clients. The change team determined that they would incorporate workforce development into the plan to increase treatment continuation rates.

As a result, the change team decided to provide weekly training sessions on topics that related to counselors' roles. The change team felt that with additional knowledge and resources at their disposal, counselors would be able to connect more effectively with consumers and help them engage and continue in treatment. In addition, the weekly training sessions would show that STEP 2 valued the counselors' work.

Making change happen

In May 2004, STEP 2 began offering weekly counselor trainings in crisis management, treatment planning, discharge planning, and the latest research on effective addiction treatment techniques. STEP 2 used staff from within the organization and presenters from closely linked resources who could provide training at little or no cost. The agency adjusted staff schedules to accommodate training sessions, and required counselors to attend the weekly trainings on a regular basis. STEP 2 videotaped all training sessions for future training and for counselors who may have missed a session.

The change team also encouraged counselors to work toward the goal of having each client attend four treatment sessions within the first eight days after assessment. They encouraged counselors to use various strategies to meet this goal, such as reminder calls, scheduling first appointments within 48 hours after first contact, and working to form a positive relationship quickly.

The teams asked counselors who had successfully increased continuation rates on their caseloads to share their strategies. Counselors with high success rates had opportunities to teach others what had worked, allowing all the counselors to feel part of a successful

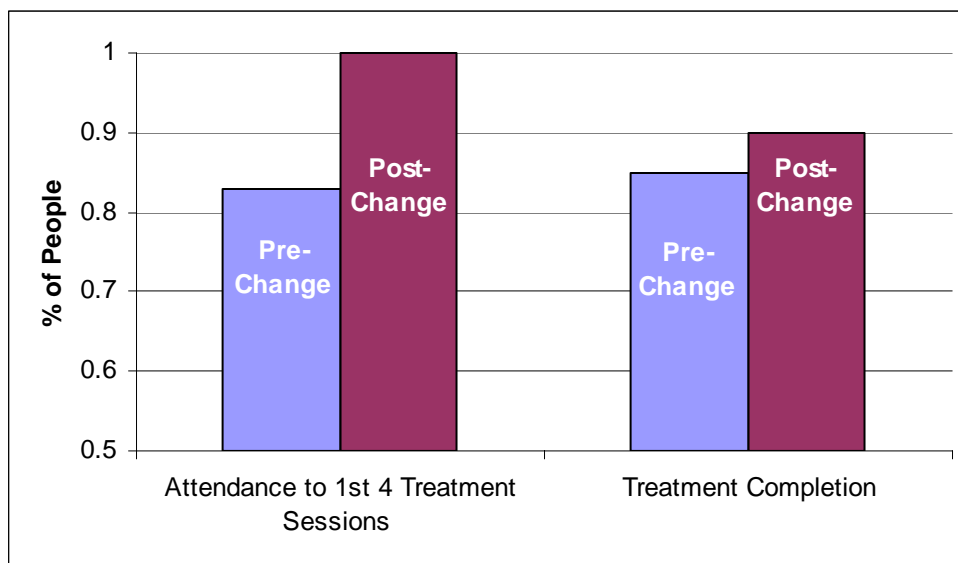
team. Recognition of job performance served as a great incentive to develop and implement strategies to increase continuation and completion rates.

The change team also used contingency management, rewarding successful counselors with gift cards, movie tickets, and ice cream coupons. Staff appreciated the recognition of a job well done.

Change results

Between May 2004 and April 2005, 100% of those entering Intensive Outpatient treatment successfully completed the first four units of treatment. Overall treatment completion increased to nearly 90%.

STEP 2 treatment completion rates



Instead of using the consumer contingency approach, STEP 2 increased continuation rates through staff contingency management and workforce development. The staff at STEP 2 work toward the goal of getting people engaged and retained in treatment so that they benefit from learning new patterns of living.

STEP 2 gave Jamie the opportunity to get off methamphetamine and provided the appropriate mix of treatment services, support, and encouragement she needed to maintain a drug-free lifestyle. At STEP 2, Jamie completed treatment for her addiction and received prenatal care and parenting education. She continued her education and set up an independent and respectable life for herself and her two young sons. Jamie was also instrumental in setting up an alumni group for STEP 2 graduates. Her story is one of a life that was truly transformed.

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