

# Care, Comfort and Hope

Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits

## Mental Health and Mental Disorders

Mental disorders vary in severity and in their impact on people's lives. The symptoms can be severe and extremely destructive, causing immeasurable suffering for the patient and their families. Hospitals see an ever-increasing number of patients seeking treatment for mental disorders in their emergency departments. Inpatient mental health services are offered at 44 hospitals in Wisconsin and are generally operated at a loss, but because of the importance of treating these patients in the community, hospitals continue to place a high priority on providing mental health services to patients and their families. Sadly, nearly a third of those who are homeless suffer from serious mental illness.

### **St. Clare Center saves lives**

Robert Michel had gone through alcohol rehab three times. When others would have given up, he continued to claw his way out of the fog and pain of the disease. Ultimately, his insurance ran out.



*Robert Michel with St. Clare Center Director Judy Hannaford*

"I have a strong will to live, a strong will to survive," he says. "I knew that someday I could be sober, so I didn't give up."

Michel's will and attitude, along with the caring experts at St. Clare Center in Baraboo, likely saved his life. Certainly without Charity Care, health care that is provided at no charge or at a greatly reduced charge due to an inability to pay, his story would have ended differently.

"About three years ago, I bought a house. I was really happy," says Michel. "I drank and grilled out with neighbors every night. Eventually I switched from beer to vodka because I couldn't get drunk on beer anymore," he says.

Finally, he told a colleague at work that he simply could not stop drinking. The co-worker, a recovering alcoholic, contacted Michel's family who got him admitted into treatment at St. Clare Center following a three-day detox.

Michel was clean for seven days, the longest he had gone without a drink in years, but only days later, his drinking resumed. He continued to attend group sessions, though his insurance had run out after only seven days.

"His insurance company shut him down," explains Judy Hannaford, director of St. Clare Center, "So we decided as a team to keep working with him. He wanted so badly to be well."

This isn't the first time that St. Clare Center has offered Charity Care to a patient in need. "Alcoholism will cost society a lot more than many other diseases if left untreated," says Hannaford. "Heart failure, cirrhosis of the liver, stroke, pancreatitis.... all could be lifelong medical crises which would be paid through your insurance company in the long run had Robbie not gotten help."

Certainly Robert Michel is a success story. He is back at his full-time job. He is eating well and exercising, and he has a wonderful family who supports him. He has been sober since April 19, 2009.

St. Clare Center continued with Michel's treatment under the Charity Care umbrella, because as Hannaford says, "It truly made the difference between life and death."

**St. Clare Hospital & Health Services, Baraboo**

### **Tragic but true**

A male flight attendant, assigned to be on one of the flights that crashed into the World Trade Center on 9-11-01, was taken off the schedule for some reason and put on another. He had coworkers and friends on the flights that crashed, and they lost their lives. Since that time, he has struggled with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and alcohol abuse. Divorced by his wife, he moved back to Manitowoc hoping to be with his family and gaining their support. In November 2008 he attempted suicide, which brought him to his current residence at Marco Manor, a recovery center. Because of this

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## **Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits (continued)**

life-altering experience, the patient is presently unemployable. He receives treatment for his mental condition through Manitowoc County and receives his medications from the Patient Assistance Program. The Community Care Program at Holy Family Memorial and Lakeshore Family Medicine assisted him with his account balances.

**Holy Family Memorial Medical Center, Manitowoc**

### ***Mental Health Task Force addresses stigma in Polk County***

Over a year ago, a grassroots Mental Health Task Force, which included three staff from St. Croix Regional Medical Center's (SCRMC) Mental Health Department, was formed in Polk County. The group is comprised of a variety of organizations, hospitals, mental health professionals, school personnel, and other interested community members from throughout Polk County. The group's initial goal was to connect with one another in order to explore ways to let individuals, families, and communities know about and access the mental health services available to them. "We also have another equally important goal," explained SCRMC's Melanie Creger, MA, LPC, LCSAC, "and that is to find ways to remove the stigma about getting mental health services."

Studies show that people with mental health problems do get better. Millions of people recover completely, leading full and active lives. Sadly, however, the stigma surrounding mental health care still exists. Social isolation, labels like "psycho," "schizo," and "crazy," as well as outright discrimination, prevent too many people with mental health problems from seeking the diagnosis and treatment they need to improve their lives.

Since the group's initial gathering, monthly meetings have been held that include mental health professionals from a number of western Wisconsin agencies (including three from SCRMC) as well as some attendees from Minnesota.

Over the course of the year, five key focus areas have been identified:

1. Mass marketing to help reduce stigma and normalize mental health as a top health priority.
2. Development of a PowerPoint presentation on mental health for use as an educational tool in schools, area businesses and community groups.
3. Educational programming on mental health specifically geared for youth and the senior population.
4. Participation of Mental Health Task Force members on state advocacy boards to examine and change policies on mental health.
5. Community wide Health Fairs to help people connect to needed services related to mental health issues.

"We have already seen results from our efforts in our community," noted Creger. "Because we are all so busy managing our day-to-day work, it's been hard to find time to learn what services are available through our respective agencies. Thanks to our efforts, there's now a greater sense of connectedness among the mental health provider community, and with better communication among all providers, more people in Polk County are now receiving the mental health services they need."

To better improve communication among agencies, the task force also created a web site that lists all area mental health resources available in Polk County: [www.scrmc.org/mentalHealthSrvcsGrid.htm](http://www.scrmc.org/mentalHealthSrvcsGrid.htm).

**St. Croix Regional Medical Center, St. Croix Falls**

### ***Gundersen Lutheran hosts depression screening***

Each year in America, about 30,000 people die by suicide. An estimated 90 percent have depression or another treatable mental illness or substance abuse disorder. To help combat suicide, Gundersen Lutheran joined in a national depression screening day.

A Gundersen Lutheran triage therapist and social worker were on hand to address questions and concerns and provide screenings when necessary. They provided educational materials to help people identify the symptoms of depression and warning signs of suicide, educated friends and family members on what to do if a loved one was at risk, and gave individuals the opportunity to talk to a mental health professional about their own or a loved one's situation.

The free screenings addressed bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. Follow-up care was also available through Gundersen Lutheran's Behavioral Health Assessment and Referral or Great Rivers 211.

### ***Sowing Seeds of Hope for distressed Wisconsin farm families***

The Wisconsin Sowing Seeds of Hope counseling program understands loss of a farm can often mean loss of a way of life or inheritance. It can also mean feelings of depression, anxiety or even sleeplessness. Farmers and farm families often have limited or no health insurance. Farm families face a host of barriers to receiving appropriate and necessary mental health services. Through Sowing Seeds of Hope, Gundersen Lutheran offers free confidential mental health counseling to qualified Wisconsin farm families.

**Gundersen Lutheran Health System, La Crosse**

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## Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits (continued)

### ***When miscarriage or infant death happen, trained RTS staff provides support***

Black River Memorial Hospital provides support to women and their families who have experienced a miscarriage or infant loss. Professional health care providers have received special training through a program called RTS (formally known as Resolve Through Sharing) that addresses the needs during a time of miscarriage and death of an infant. The RTS professional will offer the family a folder with a variety of support materials. In the folder is a ring that the family can keep as a remembrance of their baby who died.

RTS support may include:

- Recognizing the bereaved as parents to their baby who died during pregnancy, stillbirth or shortly after birth.
- Encouraging opportunities for parenting the baby who died, if desired by parents, such as holding the baby and including families members as well.
- Assisting parents with rituals for saying “good-bye” to their baby.
- Recognizing that parenting is a lifelong role that continues even after their baby dies.
- Advocating within their professional discipline and the community for parents experiencing pregnancy loss and newborn death.

Families who have experienced a miscarriage, stillbirth or newborn loss are asked if they would like to have the support of a RTS professional. They can be very helpful coordinating services such as pastoral care, arrangements for services and burial, photos, footprints and other mementoes. A woman going through miscarriage and stillbirth has many immediate physical and emotional needs and may not be able to make arrangements that would create special memories. Each person’s needs are unique, and we respect the choices that they are comfortable with in the grieving process.

**Black River Memorial Hospital, Black River Falls**

### ***“Normal,” the musical***

It may not win a Tony Award, but it is a musical that played to an audience of more than 200 at Aurora Psychiatric Hospital in Wauwatosa.

Normal is a production that started off-Broadway in New York City and is now playing in schools across the nation. The storyline is about a “normal” family of four, going about their lives, unaware of the subtle clues displayed by the daughter who is suffering with an eating disorder. As it distorts her self-image, it slowly erodes family dynamics in a profound way.

The specific eating disorder is not disclosed, leaving audience members to appreciate the drama through their own experience of an eating disorder familiar to them – or someone they love.

With the permission of the authors, this musical is available as a learning tool, playing to over 24 schools in the Milwaukee area. The production at Aurora Psychiatric Hospital was promoted to the general public via flyers and the hospital’s website. It concluded with information on the symptoms of an eating disorder and how to recognize them, along with information on how to get help. During the post-performance talkback, audience members were able to anonymously submit questions in a drop-box, which were answered by a health professional and patient with an eating disorder.

**Aurora Psychiatric Hospital, Wauwatosa**

***Submit community benefit stories to Mary Kay Grasmick, editor, at [mgrasmick@wha.org](mailto:mgrasmick@wha.org).***



Read more about hospitals connecting with their communities at [www.WiServePoint.org](http://www.WiServePoint.org).