

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. Hospitals that can offer inpatient treatment generally operate this service at a loss. With a disturbing shortage of mental health professionals, hospitals will continue to partner with each other and their communities to meet the growing demand for these services.

When the topic is diabetes, and no one wants to talk

We all know that support groups play an important role in helping individuals who are managing a chronic illness. Participants learn from invited guests who provide educational programs and many like to speak up to ask questions or share their experiences. But for people who are shy and uncomfortable about speaking in front of others, support groups can be a bit intimidating – at least at first.

Nola Hardy, RD, CD, who facilitates the monthly diabetes support group at the Aurora Health Center in Marinette, understands. Attendance ranges from 25 to 35 participants, and always there is someone new. To make it easier for newcomers to the group, she recently led a Conversation Maps class.

Conversation Maps are a teaching tool to generate dialogue between patients and educators. Like good old-fashioned board games, this “tool” consists of a roll-out map and a deck of cards containing questions that prompt participants to begin problem-solving together. As they answer questions and move progressively through the map, participants find themselves discussing the diabetes basics, the relationship between diabetes and nutrition, the value of monitoring and using the results, and, in so doing, they begin to fully appreciate how managing diabetes can improve their lives and prevent a whole host of problems.

Nola's first experience in using the Conversation Maps with the support group happened to be the time that Mrs. X attended. Mrs. X was diagnosed with diabetes four years earlier and had been in denial ever since. Having seen the notice about the support group in the local paper, she decided to check it out, even though she had not taken medication in months, missed her last two doctor appointments, and had not used her meter at home to test herself.

The Conversation Map proved to be so effective in stimulating conversation that Mrs. X became not only an active participant in the group dynamics, but she made an appointment to meet with the diabetes educators to get herself back on track with a care plan.

Aurora BayCare Medical Center, Green Bay

Upland Hills Health Hospice holds grief support group

Many times when a loved one departs, the family and friends that remain are puzzled with questions, can suffer depression or anxiety, or feel that they are alone in the pain they are suffering. The Upland Hills Hospice staff believes that although the memories of a loved one will always remain and it is difficult to go on without them, sharing thoughts and feelings with others about the grief that accompanies such a loss may allow joy to be a part of life again.

To that end, Upland Hills Hospice hosted a free, four-session grief support group. The group focused on education about grief and how to best normalize the grieving process. In addition to this, participants were able to share memories of departed loved ones and their experiences, thoughts, and feelings about grief.

“We felt that it was important for people to know they are not alone if they are experiencing grief caused by the loss of a loved one and that the feelings of distress that accompany such a loss are a normal part of the grieving process. Sharing those feelings with others can allow a sense of happiness to return, and we wanted to provide that with these sessions,” stated Elyssa Goldberg, certified social worker for Upland Hills Hospice.

Upland Hills Health, Dodgeville

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Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits (continued)

A Walk to Remember

More than one out of every four pregnant women in the United States experiences an infant loss through miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, stillbirth, or newborn death. Such a death is unexpected and often shatters the lives of parents, family, and caregivers, leaving these individuals experiencing a wide range of emotions including shock, helplessness, guilt, and grief.

As a means of providing support to those touched by the tragic death of an infant, Memorial Health Center coordinated its 11th annual "A Walk to Remember." This event is dedicated to the memory of infants lost during pregnancy or infancy. It includes a 30-minute walk/opportunity for reflection, a brief memorial, and time for discussion and emotional healing.

Memorial Health Center – An Aspirus Partner, Medford

Aurora Psychiatric Hospital's Kradwell School

Aurora's Kradwell School, located on the campus of Aurora Psychiatric Hospital, provides a full range of academic courses for Kindergarten through 12th grade students who are unable to succeed in a mainstream school setting due to medical or behavioral health difficulties.

Aurora provides in-kind operational support to this unique school valued at more than \$275,000 annually, as well as capital expenditures for furniture, equipment and computers. During the 2009/2010 school year, 153 students from 27 different school districts were served by 14 teachers at Kradwell. The Aurora Health Care Foundation provides scholarship funding.

One student's story

It is difficult to imagine how a troubled student with a grade point average of 1.3 who could not succeed at two different high schools could ever have a chance at turning it all around. Well, meet Janie.

Janie came to Kradwell School at the end of her sophomore year from a high school where her attendance was poor, she did no homework, and she had a general lack of focus to complete tasks. Janie's parents decided to enroll her in Kradwell's summer school program to see if any improvement could be made.

That summer, Janie earned two credits and liked the individualized teaching style, as well as the small school atmosphere. Her parents elected to keep Janie at Kradwell. Over the next two years, she flourished: she liked coming to school; her grades improved; she was happy. Both academically and personally, Janie was enjoying success, earning a 3.1 grade point average and helping others through jewelry and soup sales, all proceeds going for scholarship. In her Economics class, she raised enough money to buy a cow for Africa, demonstrating her compassion for social issues.

Janie graduated from Kradwell on June 10, 2010, having completed her final semester with an added responsibility – an internship in the communication center at Aurora Psychiatric Hospital, to get real-world experience before leaving secondary school. Through this maturing process, a sensitive and caring young adult has emerged who can move forward with confidence to her next endeavor.

Aurora Psychiatric Hospital, Wauwatosa

Caring to help those facing a loss

Children learn to cope with the loss of a loved one in Agnesian HealthCare's Grief Relief Program.

Reyna Jimenez and Berenice Carbajal were just seven and 10 years old when their grandmother died in 2007. Both girls – especially Reyna – were close to their grandmother, says Elba Carbajal, the girls' mother.

Reyna and Berenice were having difficulty expressing their feelings about the loss of their grandmother. Elba saw that a Grief Relief program designed to support children and families grieving the loss of a loved one was being initiated, and contacted Sister Joyann Repp, the bereavement coordinator, for more information.

"Grief Relief's mission is to provide a safe place where children, teens and their families can grieve openly, sharing their experience and moving through the grief process in a supportive environment of their peers," Repp says.

Elba and her girls were some of the first participants in the program. Two years later, they still attend Grief Relief every Monday evening.

"My kids love going," Elba says. "It's helped me too. The more I talk about it, the less I cry."

Agnesian HealthCare, Fond du Lac

Submit community benefit stories to Mary Kay Grasmick, editor, at mgrasmick@wha.org.



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