

Mental health agencies get grants

01:00 AM EDT on Wednesday, October 6, 2010



By Felice J. Freyer

Journal Medical Writer

Two Rhode Island agencies have received federal grants to integrate primary health care into the treatment of behavioral disorders - and also to make it easier for people seeking medical care to address mental problems.

The Providence Center and the Kent Center for Human and Organizational Development, community mental health centers, will each receive \$2 million over four years through the Public Health Fund, which is part of the federal health-care law.

"The long-established split between 'mental' and 'physical' health is not justified in research, and should not be perpetuated in health care," said Pamela Hyde, administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, which is providing the grants.

The Kent Center and the Providence Center are among 43 community behavioral health-care centers sharing in some \$26 million in federal grants.

The money will advance the "no wrong door" philosophy in which people can get the care they need whether they walk into a medical clinic or a community

mental health center, said Dale Klatzker, president and CEO of the Providence Center.

The Providence Center has already made strides at combining physical and mental health care. A grant from the Rhode Island Foundation enabled the Providence Center to place full-time therapists at each of two clinics that provide physical health care.

The Providence Center is also renovating space to open up a medical clinic on its premises. Many people with mental illness also have such physical problems as diabetes, heart disease and smoking habits, Klatzker said. They receive inconsistent care in stops at clinics and emergency rooms, he said.

"By building a medical clinic in the community health center, it will be easier for people to get the care they need," he said.

The latest grant, \$500,000 in the first year, will now pay for the hiring of primary care nurses for the clinic and will also enhance a fitness program with the hiring of two additional personal trainers.

"People begin to feel better when they are active, exercising, eating right," Klatzker said. "They take fewer medicines. Overall, everything gets better for them."

The grant to the Kent Center -- \$496,636 in the first year -- will enable a medical practice to set up shop within the Warwick community mental health center, as part of Kent's new "Total Care Integration Project." The project will also include fitness and wellness programs, run by the Kent County YMCA.

The Kent Center plans to renovate 1,800 square feet at its Post Road building. **Dr. Martin Kerzer, of Associates in Primary Care Medicine**, will be supervising physician, working part-time overseeing a full-time nurse practitioner and, eventually, an additional physician.

In the first year, starting next spring, the practice is expected to serve about 500 current clients of the Kent Center. In the second year, it will open to the general population, including people without serious mental illness. By the fourth year, the clinic is expected to serve 3,500 patients.

"Anyone can benefit from this model of integrated care," Kent Center CEO David Lauterbach said in a statement. "We know that people with serious mental illnesses die on average 25 years earlier than the general public due to inadequate access to medical care, so they will certainly benefit."

Additionally, Lauterbach added, many people who are not clients of the center will benefit from attention to the depression, anxiety, stress and substance use that often underlie or worsen their physical health issues.

The Kent Center also plans to incorporate the principles of HealthAccess RI, a unique program in which uninsured people pay low monthly membership fees to obtain primary care.