



Mental Health News

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BOARD OF SUPERVISORS APPROVES MEASURE EXPANDING MENTAL EVALUATION TEAMS

By H. Chung So, Public Information Officer II

On Tuesday, Jan. 10, 2017, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a measure to expand the Mental Evaluation Team (MET) partnership between the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) and Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD), which will enhance outcomes when sheriff's deputies engage with people suffering from mental illness or crisis.

Once fully funded and staffed, the expansion will more than double the program's current capacity in responding to incidents involving people with mental health issues. It will do so by increasing co-deployed mental evaluation teams—consisting of a mental health clinician and a sheriff's deputy—from 10 to 23 and

establishing a specialized call center to handle and triage 911 calls involving mental illnesses or traumas.

The measure was co-sponsored by Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Kathryn Barger, with support from leadership of multiple county departments, including a prominent role by LACDMH to provide subject matter expertise and funding to support the initiative.

Per Jonathan E. Sherin, M.D., Ph.D., the new Director of Mental Health, "Our investment in MET expansion is a key tactic in supporting a constructive interface between peace officers and those suffering from serious mental illness, as well optimizing our redirection of such

individuals away from incarceration toward treatment environments. Both goals are high priority for us because we, as a county, aim to infuse additional humanity into every way we address mental health issues. This stands in contrast to the historically fear and stigma driven methods that benefit no one, drive poorer outcomes and create a greater financial burden to the public."

"Partners from LASD and the Department of Mental Health consistently offer compassionate care . . . to apply de-escalation techniques to help ease some of the most difficult, complex and high-risk situations patrol deputies face daily," said Los Angeles County Sheriff Jim McDonnell. "This is an opportunity for us to be able to step up and do what's right, do what's compassionate and make much more effective use of resources than we've been able to do in the past."

Additionally, the Los Angeles County District

Attorney's Office had suggested expanding MET program in a 2015 Mental Health Advisory Board Report, a recommendation that District Attorney Jackie Lacey has reiterated after a MET program briefing and ride-along with Dr. Sherin on Jan. 6.

"These teams play an invaluable role in maintaining the safety of both the person in a mental health crisis and the officers during what otherwise might become a contentious and, potentially, deadly incident," District Attorney Lacey said. "They also save taxpayer money by diverting non-violent offenders from jails to more appropriate settings that provide mental health services."

The motion also received support from mental health advocates and organizations, including the Los Angeles chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

"I cannot emphasize enough the difference it makes for a family dealing with a mental health crisis to receive a response from a co-deployed mental health and law enforcement team," said Brittney Weissman, executive director of NAMI's Los Angeles County Council. "The peace of mind, the hope for recovery and our confidence in the system skyrockets when we see MET arrive compared to a law enforcement only team."

The LASD/LACDMH Mental Evaluation Team (MET) pairs a mental health clinician with a law enforcement officer on a full-time basis. The program was the first of its kind in the nation, established for the purpose of responding to 911 calls involving a psychiatric crisis or a critical incident.



The program was developed in pilot form in Oct. 1991. Based on the success of the pilot the Board of Supervisors approved funding in July 1992 for four field teams and one supervisory team. LACDMH and LASD then developed a 40-hour cross training for the clinicians and deputies to better understand the nexus between the different organizational cultures and the populations they serve. The first night of MET service was Jan. 31, 1993. The mission of the MET is to:

- Provide a rapid and compassionate response at the time and place the crisis is occurring.
- Avoid hospitalizations and/or arrests whenever possible.
- Decompress County emergency rooms and jails by getting the person to the appropriate care as quickly as possible.
- De-escalate violent confrontations between law enforcement and persons with mental illness.

Although the first MET was established in 1993, the program has expanded very little over the last two decades. In 1996, Supervisor Antonovich used discretionary funds to establish one additional team for the Antelope Valley. The next expansion occurred in 2015 when three additional teams were established in the North County.

The program has been awarded the Productivity & Quality Award, the National Association of County Organizations Award and the Extra Miles Award at the annual Mental Illness and Law Enforcement Seminar. In Fiscal Year 2015-16, the MET program responded to 1,154 calls for service, with 64% resulting in hospitalizations for mental health treatment and less than 1% resulting in an arrest. ♦

▼ Photo courtesy of D.A. Jackie Lacey's office.



LACDMH PHARMACY NETWORK TO INCREASE 1000%—BUT PRINCIPLES OF GOOD CARE STAY THE SAME

By Roderick Shaner, M.D., LACDMH Medical Director

LACDMH took a big step to further upgrade pharmacy services, increasing the number of pharmacies in our network from 81 to 1,700. More pharmacies mean easier access to prescription medication for the tens of thousands of LACDMH clients that use county-funded services.

How did we do this? On Tuesday, Jan. 17, the Board of Supervisors approved a county contract with Magellan, a Pharmacy Benefits Manager (PBM), an organization that specializes in behavioral health needs. PBMs, currently providing services to over 250 million Americans, are companies—third party administrators—that use information technology, purchasing power and quality management algorithms to allow contracting private and public health programs like LACDMH to improve the quality and efficiency of their prescription operations.

Magellan has the ability to ensure that LACDMH gets the medications that clients need at the lowest possible prices, and that clients can fill their prescriptions within a few miles of any LACDMH clinic or wherever they live. Magellan also has tools

that allow clinicians and administrators to measure quality of prescribing. Magellan's information systems integrate smoothly with LACDMH's electronic health record.

PBMs operate by making prescribing fully electronic, allowing detailed tracking of formulary use. It uses sophisticated technology to route electronic prescriptions, develop and maintain drug formularies, negotiate prices with drug manufacturers and process and pay bills from pharmacies for dispensed drugs.

Of course, quality prescribing is about something far more important than electronic bells and whistles and low prices. At LACDMH, we recognize that the very core of good prescribing is a relationship between prescriber and patient that is built upon collaboration and trust. It means that a thorough and careful assessment has been completed and all options for care have been discussed in a way that the patient can fully understand. It means that the prescriber has ensured that the patient knows what the medication is supposed to do and what the side effects might be. It means the judgement about

whether benefits outweigh risks is based on an understanding of the patient's wishes and values and that family, when involved in care, has also been included. It means the prescriber has access to proper past medical records and consultation. And it means timely follow up and re-evaluation.

Quality prescribing also means that physicians and nurse practitioners in our system are highly trained, with access to educational opportunities to learn about results of the latest medication research. It means that LACDMH ensures that the medications available to our clients include all those that are necessary for good mental health care treatment. And it means that the limits of medication are respected and that all LACDMH clinicians recognize that medication is no substitute for other effective interventions.

The PBM will move LACDMH firmly into twenty-first century prescribing. We'll use it to improve convenience, quality and cost. But we'll also ensure that the timeless values of respect, collaboration and recovery continue to guide care in our system. ♦

REFLECTIONS

"Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope... and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

- Robert F. Kennedy

This quote, by RFK, has been an inspiration to me since I first read it in 8th grade. It made me believe that my actions, big or small, could have impact if others were doing similar things, such as picking up a piece of trash at the school. Human beings have both the gift and the responsibility of consciousness which connects us by definition to each other, to nature, to the universe. Every time one of us steps up through an extra phone call, a bigger smile, an effort to listen more patiently, an additional attempt to learn something new or a suggestion for better policy, our collective pushes harder to decrease suffering. Please keep pushing and rest assured you are making a difference.

- Jonathan E. Sherin, M.D., Ph.D, LACDMH Director

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We welcome submissions of inspirational quotes, poems or passages from LACDMH employees for future editions of Mental Health News. Please send yours to pio@dmh.lacounty.gov.