

CARES CRISIS RESIDENTIAL NORTH

An Underutilized Mental Health Asset

SUMMARY

In Santa Barbara County, the need for additional facilities to treat the mentally ill has been a concern for many years. Nearly a decade ago, a community roundtable identified a particularly serious deficit of mental health care facilities in the North County. In an attempt to rectify this situation, the Santa Barbara County Department of Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services (ADMHS) contracted with Telecare Corporation in 2008 for the operation of a 12-bed short-term residential facility in Santa Maria. This program, CARES Crisis Residential North (CARES), provides post-acute care for those patients in further need of stabilizing their mental health.

The 2011-12 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury (Jury) was concerned to learn from citizen complaints that although the demand for follow-up mental health care is ever present, the 12 transitional beds at CARES are often underutilized.

Upon investigation, the Jury learned that CARES, which is an unlocked facility, is staffed to care for post-acute mentally ill patients with or without medical insurance. The level of service that CARES can provide makes it a unique asset in Santa Barbara County's mental health care system.

The Jury recommends that ADMHS institute an aggressive outreach program to all medical and law enforcement entities in the County informing them of the valuable services available at CARES and further extend that outreach to San Luis Obispo County. Of equal importance, the Jury recommends that ADMHS staff develop a rapport with all emergency room physicians to facilitate a protocol for admitting their patients to the transitional CARES program.

BACKGROUND

In 2004, a community round table cosponsored by the Santa Barbara County Department of Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services and the Mental Health Commission, along with representatives from community organizations, health care professionals, and law enforcement providers, met to improve rapid access to care for crucial mental health needs in Santa Barbara County, particularly in North County. An ADMHS document dated November 30, 2004, provided information about some of the realities ADMHS was confronting:

- More than half of the calls for crisis assessment to the Mental Health Assessment Team are from North County

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- An estimated seven individuals visit Marian Medical Center every day needing acute care for alcohol or drug intoxication, psychiatric crisis, or some combination of the two
- On average, one North County resident is hospitalized every day for psychiatric care
- There is no transitional psychiatric inpatient facility in North County

In response to these needs, ADMHS agreed to fund a 12-bed post-crisis residential facility in Santa Maria. It contracted with Telecare Corporation to operate CARES Crisis Residential North to stabilize adults following a crisis due to alcohol, drug and/or mental health problems. The facility opened in March 2008. The program is funded through Santa Barbara County and the Mental Health Services Act and provides voluntary, short-term services typically lasting five to seven days. The program provides transitional support for patients recovering from a mental health crisis. About 60 percent of the referrals come from Marian Medical Center or the Mobile Crisis Team North (Crisis Team).

CARES was established to provide services for those individuals who have improved but are in need of further stabilization of their mental health condition. This short-term care involves implementation of integrated aftercare services, so that upon discharge, these patients are more capable of resuming self-sustaining lives in the community. The CARES facility was presented to the community as a model of care that would provide transitional beds, integrated recovery programs, and partnerships to work with law enforcement and non-profit organizations to prevent relapses, thereby reducing other high-cost care.

In recent months, citizens of the County have voiced concerns regarding patients who require an increasing need for mental health follow-up. Despite this apparent need for post-acute mental health stabilization and case management, too many beds at the Santa Maria facility remain unoccupied. These factors prompted the Jury to investigate why this facility remains underutilized.

METHODOLOGY

The Jury interviewed staff from the Santa Barbara County Department of Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services, the Mental Wellness Center, the Santa Barbara County Psychiatric Health Facility (PHF), Mobile Crisis Center North and CARES Crisis Residential North. Also reviewed were reports and contracts generated by ADMHS, California State laws and regulations, and news articles.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The Program

While at the CARES facility, patients receive therapeutic or rehabilitative services in a non-institutional residential setting that provides a structured program. The service includes a range of activities and services that support patients in their efforts to restore, maintain, and apply interpersonal and independent living skills, and to access community support services.

Administrators of the ADMHS, PHF, Vista Del Mar, the Mobile Crisis Teams and CARES confer through a daily conference call at 10:30 each morning. The Jury was told that each patient's condition is evaluated and decisions are made on patient services, discharge plans and level of care. Additionally, the availability and locality of beds is discussed. The Jury was puzzled that so few patients moved from the acute facilities to the stabilizing aftercare program at CARES.

Upon visiting the facility, the Jury observed a dormitory-like atmosphere. While patients have individual spaces, there are many common areas where they may socialize. This is a short-term facility, where the normal stay is five to seven days. During this time the staff looks for stabilization and linkages that give the residents what they need to care for themselves at home. Residents are encouraged to go out into the community and to connect with family and friends. Staff trains residents on personal health care issues. Each individual receives a transitional plan for returning to the community. Housing is usually in place. There is follow-up case management for 30 days.

Admission Criteria

CARES is licensed as a "Social Rehabilitation Facility" and operates under *California Code of Regulations Title 22, Division 6, Chapter 2, Section 81000 et seq.* Such programs are licensed to emphasize mental health stabilization and appropriate referrals for further treatment or support services. It is not licensed to care for acute mental health patients, but rather, those in need of short-term transitional services and discharge coordination.

CARES is a voluntary, short-stay environment which offers a place to regain a sense of stability after a mental health crisis. Its purpose is to help individuals stabilize and return to their previous level of functioning so that they may return home or transition to less intensive levels of service.

Those admitted:

- Must not be combative or medically compromised
- Must be ambulatory and stable on their medication
- Must be referred through ADMHS agencies
- Must be referred by a physician
- Must want to come to the facility
- Must be adults

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A referral for admission can be made by health services (Corizon) at the County jail, staff at the PHF (a 16-bed, locked involuntary mental health facility) or Vista Del Mar (also an involuntary facility) in Ventura County. Vista Del Mar is a contracted facility where Santa Barbara County patients are housed due to a shortage of acute beds. The Crisis Team may also conduct an assessment and make an admission recommendation. Following the Crisis Team's recommendation, an examining physician, often at an Emergency Room, must fill out a 10-page admissions application. The process requires documentation of the patient's medical history from several sources. Some of the patient's medical history may not be available to the Emergency Room physician. Unfortunately, the admissions form is mandated by the State, therefore CARES is required to use it. Over the past three years the admissions package has been reduced, but it is still formidable.

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Usage

While conducting its investigation, the Jury was provided differing information concerning utilization. According to ADMHS, over the past few years, the annual average occupancy of the 12-bed facility has ranged from 7.0 to 8.6 beds per day.

Telecare's usage data also shows consistent underutilization. Its Statement of Work states it will serve approximately 625 adults recovering from a mental health crisis annually. The actual number in 2010-11 was only 322 or 51 percent of the planned participation. On only two days in early 2012 have all beds been filled. Figures from Telecare show the following average daily bed occupancy:

November 2011	9.7
December 2011	5.8
January 2012	7.5
February 2012	5.5
March 2012	8.5

Mentally ill patients who are in crisis (*Section 5150 of the California Welfare and Institution Code*) are admitted to the PHF where patients are stabilized until they are no longer a danger to themselves or others. Once stabilized many of these patients benefit from continued care to further support their recovery as envisioned by the 2004 community roundtable.

The Jury was also told ADMHS does not do outreach. The Probation Department only became aware of the program within the past year, and has made its first referral. The first two referrals from Cottage Hospital are also recent. When questioned, a Crisis Team spokesman responded that Emergency Room physicians, many of whom are new, are not

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aware of CARES capabilities. Other outreach possibilities include areas in San Luis Obispo County which are in close proximity and currently do not have such a facility. The Jury believes that if other County mental health agencies were made aware of CARES capabilities, the usage would increase, benefiting both the patients and the County.

Finances

The contract with CARES has two parts. There is a fixed portion, as the facility must operate 24/7/365 even if only one bed is occupied. There is a variable portion based on the number of bed days occupied. The variable portion of the contract is renegotiated at the end of the fiscal year based on the number of bed days of the previous year. For fiscal year 2011-12, the fixed costs were projected to be \$81,618 and the variable costs were \$891,681 for a total cost of \$973,299. Because of the variable cost component, the Jury determined that the County receives a partial rebate based on the number of unused beds from the previous year.

According to ADMHS, the cost for operating CARES has decreased to a bed-day cost of \$378. The bed-day cost of the PHF is \$1,214. If the 16-bed PHF is fully occupied, patients are sent to Vista Del Mar in Ventura, at a cost of \$748 per day.

ADMHS can recover 50 percent of the costs of Medi-Cal patients in either the PHF or CARES, but not for patients at Vista Del Mar. There is no recovery of costs for non Medi-Cal patients, and the Jury was told it is difficult to get this population served. When an indigent patient is admitted to the PHF, staff makes every effort to get the patient qualified for government help. The Jury was also told it can take up to six months for this to happen, and that most applicants are denied on their first application, usually because they have no permanent address. However, CARES accepts all appropriate referrals, regardless of ability to pay. It is the only aftercare facility to do so.

Responding to a 2010-11 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury report, *Homeless Mentally Ill Indigent Recidivism*, the County's Executive Office investigated the cost of incarceration vs. the cost of supportive services for the homeless mentally ill. The investigation found it costs \$44,572 per year for incarceration, but would cost only \$33,560 a year to provide support services for the mentally ill. The Jury believes maximum use of the CARES facility could reduce costs for the County.

CONCLUSION

Telecare Corporation appears to be operating an efficient and effective program for aftercare of recovering mentally ill patients. The 2011-12 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury was favorably impressed by CARES staff, program and facility. The Jury encourages full utilization of this unique asset. Telecare and Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services need to aggressively inform those who could refer patients to this facility of the advantages of doing so.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1a

CARES Crisis Residential North, with a 12-bed capacity, has averaged 7.4 full beds in the last five months through March, 2012.

Finding 1b

The Santa Barbara County medical community is not fully aware of the capabilities of CARES Crisis Residential North and its benefit to recovering mentally ill patients.

Finding 1c

CARES Crisis Residential North is the only unlocked facility for mentally ill patients who have no insurance in both Santa Barbara County and San Luis Obispo County.

Finding 1d

CARES Crisis Residential North helps mentally ill indigent patients obtain food stamps and Medi-Cal insurance; as well as helping them find homes and jobs.

Finding 1e

Utilization of the CARES Crisis Residential North facility has been shown to be a cost effective treatment option for Santa Barbara County post-acute mentally ill patients.

Recommendation 1a

That the Mobile Crisis Team and CARES Crisis Residential North develop and coordinate an outreach program with providers of services to the mentally ill on the capabilities of CARES Crisis Residential North for possible placement of their appropriate patients.

Recommendation 1b

That Santa Barbara County Department of Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services coordinate with the San Luis Obispo County Psychiatric Health Facility on the unoccupied bed capacity of CARES Crisis Residential North for possible placement of appropriate patients.

Finding 2

When Emergency Room physicians are not provided the patient's mental/medical history, they are reluctant to sign a patient's admission package to CARES Crisis Residential North.

Recommendation 2

That the Mobile Crisis Team and CARES Crisis Residential North work with Emergency Room staff to facilitate a protocol for admitting their patients to the transitional CARES program.

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Finding 3

CARES Crisis Residential North is a safe environment for patients discharged from a locked facility to transition back into society.

Recommendation 3

That CARES Crisis Residential North coordinate with the Santa Barbara County Main Jail/City Jails and the Santa Barbara County Psychiatric Health Facility on the capacity of CARES Crisis Residential North for possible placement of their appropriate patients upon release.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSE

In accordance with California Penal Code Section 933.05, each agency and government body affected by or named in this report is requested to respond in writing to the findings and recommendations in a timely manner. The following are the affected agencies for this report, with the mandated response period for each.

Santa Barbara County Department of Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services – 90 days

Findings 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2, 3
Recommendations 1a, 1b, 2, 3

Santa Barbara Psychiatric Health Facility – 90 days

Finding 3
Recommendation 3

Santa Barbara County Sheriff – 60 days

Finding 3
Recommendation 3

Santa Barbara County Probation Department – 90 days

Finding 1b
Recommendation 1a