Overcoming challenging barriers to community engagement associated with severe and persistent mental illness using evidence-based treatment interventions.

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Introduction
Historically individuals who experience severe and persistent mental health symptoms are identified as experiencing chronic symptoms requiring long-term treatment. Treatment of these symptoms typically produces modest results and the focus shifts from achievement of meaningful and desired goals to maintenance of the individual’s “baseline” level of functioning. This leads to a cycle of long-term placement in residential or inpatient settings with relapses resulting in higher levels of care. Individuals trapped in this cycle tend to be insulated within a system of care and with little connection to the supports and resources in the community at large and few opportunities to engage in meaningful work.

Our aim has been to systematically target those symptoms which create the greatest barriers for individuals working to return to living productive lives. Overcoming challenging barriers to community engagement associated with severe and persistent mental illness using evidence-based treatment interventions requires long-term treatment. Treatment of these symptoms which create the greatest barriers for a client’s “baseline” level of functioning. This leads to a cycle of long-term placement in residential or inpatient settings with relapses resulting in higher levels of care. Individuals trapped in this cycle tend to be insulated within a system of care and with little connection to the supports and resources in the community at large and few opportunities to engage in meaningful work.

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Implementation Process

Preparation
- Identify project leaders
- Identify programs and population
- Collect baseline outcomes for at least 3 months prior to implementation.

Development
- Obtain agency buy-in
- Identify goals of using this model with the specific population.
- On-going consultation with expert
- Staff at all levels are trained to provide treatment.

Implementation
- Obtain programs and population
- Identify project leaders
- Intensive, experiential training with an expert in the practice
- Adapt for service needs

Continuous Improvement
- Outcomes specific to model are collected
- On-going fidelity monitoring conducted.

Timeline of Implementation

- Obtain agency buy-in
- Identify goals of using this model with the specific population.
- Collect baseline outcomes for at least 3 months prior to implementation.
- On-going consultation with expert
- Staff at all levels are trained to provide treatment.

Things to Consider

1. Base interventions in the community whenever possible for increased applicability and generalization.
2. While it is important that the program serving the individual is familiar with the treatment they are involved in, it is helpful to provide the treatment in an outpatient or outreach context whenever possible to ensure that the treatment sessions feel different from day to day activities.
3. Create a system for outcomes collection at the point of implementation and gather baseline data for at least 3 months prior to implementation.
4. Plan for a sustainable practice at the outset. Even when starting small, have an idea of who will champion the practice at the various levels of service and what direction you plan to move in next.

References

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