

# HILLVIEW

MENTAL HEALTH CENTER, INC.

WINTER 2008

## MESSAGE FROM

*Eva*



## Missing this Election Year: Ideas for Mental Health Insurance

Message from Eva S. McCraven, President and Chief Executive Officer

Health insurance is in the news these days, a sure sign that we are now in the midst of the presidential election. The remaining candidates are vying to offer creative yet fiscally responsible proposals to protect the estimated 47 million Americans without coverage. Like other health care professionals who work with uninsured clients, I focus on my own concerns when I listen to the candidates. I keep an ear open to how they would handle mental illness and substance abuse. I want to know how our next president might help uninsured poor people who are mentally ill. Those people, in my view, are among the most vulnerable members of our society and the least likely to rise above their circumstances without considerable help. While they arguably take a huge toll on limited public resources, they respond well to treatment, particularly early intervention.

At Hillview, we are experts on the devastating combination of poverty and psychiatric disorders and substance abuse. We know that people who are untreated can get caught in a vicious cycle: Mental illness can lead to the loss of employment and the loss of health insurance. The loss or lack of health insurance and the inability to get treatment intensify the mental illness. The disability and its dire consequences on the lives of clients and their families continue. A spiral into poverty

is highly likely, leading to more depression, mental illness and substance abuse.

### Focus on the poor and uninsured

Hillview, like other mental health agencies, receives relatively little funding from public sources to treat uninsured clients. Unfortunately, Hillview has the dubious distinction of being located in one of the poorest areas of Los Angeles County. A big percentage of the people living in our East San Fernando Valley service area are among the "working poor" who have no insurance, and do not qualify for Medi-Cal. People who do have insurance often lack coverage for mental illness or addictions. While most states have laws on the books requiring insurance policies to treat both mental and physical illnesses, when exemptions are taken into account, only 20 percent of employer-sponsored health insurance plans have such parity.

We all know that health insurance companies rely on premium-paying, healthy customers to offset costs from less-healthy, heavy users of medical services. Mental health agencies are similar. When our geographic areas are broad enough to include significant numbers of clients with insurance, we can stretch our limited resources to treat more uninsured clients. But decision-makers lack fine-tuned demographic data that would reveal levels of poverty on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis; they distribute their funds using formulas deemed fair and equitable based on other, broader measures. This caps the ability of mental health agencies in areas of high poverty to respond to needs in their own neighborhoods.

### High public cost of mental health treatment

Hillview is not unique. Mental health agencies in poor areas throughout the country also struggle. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) reports that people with

low income and no insurance are twice as likely to have psychiatric disorders, that approximately 20 percent of people with serious mental conditions are uninsured, and that about 15 percent of the uninsured have serious mental health conditions.

NAMI also reports that poor, uninsured people with mental illnesses are likely to rely on emergency services, and that today's overall spending on mental health care for the uninsured exceeds spending for the Medicare and Medicaid population.

### Creative outreach treatments

Hillview, like other agencies in areas with high numbers of underserved and unserved populations, tries to broaden the client base in creative and fiscally responsible ways. For example, this year we received funding for two Full Service Partnership programs, one for adults and one for Transitional Age Youth between the ages of 18 and 25. We also received grant funding for a wellness center and a program for local senior citizens. These programs help us fulfill our mission while allowing us to extend our reach among uninsured and low-income members of our community. The greater percentage of this funding, however, is for people who have Medi-Cal insurance benefits.

To increase our capacity to serve our community we cheerfully accept donations. Friends of Hillview donate items to our Clothes Closet, register for community contributions at Ralphs and Food 4 Less, provide food for Holiday dinners, "buy" the beautiful tiles in our lobby, and generously write checks. Until the leaders of this country make significant changes in the formal system for dealing with uninsured and low-income people, or demographers adjust their data-gathering methods to the street level, mental health professionals will have to rely on funding methods that are never mentioned in presidential debates.



# Intensive "Whatever It Takes" Program Brings Hope To Vulnerable, Chronically Mentally Ill Adults and Transition-Age Youth

Some of the area's most vulnerable and at-risk residents are now getting outreach help from Hillview Mental Health Center through an innovative state program that advances the goals of recovery. Using funds made available through California's Mental Health Services Act, Hillview has instituted two Full Service Partnership (FSP) programs, one for adults between the ages of 26 and 59 and another for Transitional Age Youth (TAY) ages 16 to 25. Both programs are designed for clients who recently left jail or a psychiatric facility, are homeless or at risk of being homeless, and have a documented history of mental illness or addictions.

## Different from traditional programs

"FSP programs convey a message to severe chronically mentally ill clients that they can improve their lives and achieve goals that are important to them," explains Jack L. Avila, LCSW, Hillview Clinical Director. "The programs are more hands-on and client-focused than traditional mental health and medication services that concentrate on defined treatment plans. Caseworkers and mental health professionals anticipate setbacks for clients in this population group, but will work with clients using a 'whatever it takes' philosophy."

FSP programs will reach the area's underserved and underserved populations. These clients typically lack access to mental health treatment because they may lack supportive families, have no sources of income, little access to sanitary conditions and food and transportation, and limited coping skills.

Dr. Peggy Wilson-Jordan is director of the Transitional Age Youth program, which is funded for 40 clients. Dr. Maxine Day, who is director of Hillview Adult Services, runs the adult program with its 103 slots and a sepa-

rate program for adults over 59 who need outpatient services. The programs are "culturally competent partnerships" and involve families whenever possible so caseworkers can develop individualized, comprehensive service plans.

## Adults benefit from "wraparound" case management

The Adult FPS is a wraparound or intensive case management program on an outpatient basis, explains Dr. Day. A goal of treatment is to prevent chronically mentally ill clients from backsliding and requiring hospitalization or returning to living on the streets. In addition to medication management and psychotherapy, the program will help clients prepare for jobs or return to school, often coordinating with state or county social service programs.

Clients are assigned to Hillview through community outreach services with ties to the Department of Mental Health. For example, notes Dr. Wilson-Jordan, Hillview's program for transitional age youth gets some referrals from the Jail Linkage Program at the Twin Towers near downtown Los Angeles. "We have a lot of experience working with people with mental illness who are just out of jail or have conviction records through our AB2034 program," she says.

## Unconventional case management outreach

Dr. Wilson-Jordan, who joined Hillview in mid-2007, spent 16 years running a residential treatment facility for adolescent boys in the San Fernando Valley. She fully understands the TAY clients. Unlike adults, she says, younger clients often have little experience taking care of themselves and taking responsibility for their mental health treatment.

To get them to participate in their recovery, "sometimes you have to go out and look for them and bring them in." This involves developing communications networks in the field with people who congregate in places such as Skid Row, Venice Beach and Hollywood.

The "whatever it takes" and, often, "wherever it goes" approaches to help clients toward recovery and independence can involve unconventional case management services. Dr. Wilson-Jordan and her case managers have taken clients to medical clinics and brought them to Hillview for appointments. They have taken clients to court to win decisions so parents could reunite with children and young adults could expunge criminal records. They have explained the responsibilities of parenthood to teenagers. Hillview often taps its own cash from donations or flexible funding accounts from the Department of Mental Health to provide FSP clients with necessities such as furniture, clothing, text books, and housing funds.

## Pride in small accomplishments

"We understand that accomplishing little things, like taking meds and keeping appointments, add up to bigger accomplishments," says Dr. Wilson-Jordan. "We also understand that our clients have made poor choices and are likely to continue making poor choices. We can move people forward two steps then see them go one step back. But maybe the next time they'll go three steps forward."

Experienced caseworkers have no great success stories, she observes. "We don't talk about kids growing up in squalor and becoming president. But we are proud when our clients earn their GEDs, high school diplomas, and demonstrate the ability to function in society in a meaningful and self-sufficient way."

## Thank you, Friends of Hillview!

Many people, businesses and organizations support our efforts to help our clients overcome their mental illness and live their lives to the fullest. We truly value your generosity and your donations of time, money, items, and services.

If you would like to contribute to Hillview Mental Health Center and help improve the lives of our clients, please contact Sande Weiss at 818-896-1161, ext. 218.



# Face to Face



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*Hillview Mental Health Center is proud of the nearly 140 talented and caring employees and volunteers who work hard to improve the lives of more than 2,000 East San Fernando Valley residents with mental illnesses who come here each year. We're pleased to introduce a few of these dedicated people to our readers.*



# Greeters and Greetings from Hillview

Visitors to Hillview Mental Health Center now receive warm welcomes along with clip-on tags! The new Greeters at the lobby sign-in table are clients who are gaining important employment experience while dispensing essential advice. The "Greeter" program was launched last May with training funds from Hillview's Opportunity House, which helps clients prepare for jobs as part of a life-skills program for independence and self-sufficiency. The first six employees quickly discovered that their part-time jobs require multiple talents:

greeter, security specialist, traffic cop, and even sales pitch artist! Twice a year Hillview conducts satisfaction surveys from the California State Department of Mental Health. Greeters encouraged clients to complete the four-page questionnaire – to stunning success. They achieved a record-breaking 292 completed forms, up from 60 to 100 in past years. This 15 percent return is a response rate that professional pollsters would envy. Local employers take note: Hillview greeters ready to move on may be knocking on your doors.



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Hillview Mental Health Center, Inc., is a non-profit corporation that serves as a Gateway to Recovery, Independence and Health for nearly 2,000 East San Fernando Valley residents each year.

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The mission of Hillview Mental Health Center, Inc. is to assist in empowering individuals and families affected by mental illness to assess their needs, strengths and goals, and work collaboratively with mental health professionals and other staff to plan services that are person-centered, culturally competent and effective in promoting recovery and the ability to live as fully participating members of the community.



**HILLVIEW**  
Mental Health Center, INC.

A non-profit corporation serving the  
East San Fernando Valley since 1966

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