



DIRECTOR'S NEWSLETTER: Medical Services



Dr. Jai Africa

Happy summer! I'm excited to share the work of our BHRS Medical Teams, led by Medical Director, Dr. Tasha Souter, and the compassionate services they provide. Our dedicated prescribers—physicians and nurse practitioners—deliver high quality, evidence-based psychiatric care which plays a vital role in managing the symptoms of serious mental illness, helping individuals regain stability and improve their overall quality of life.

When combined with therapy and support, medications can foster greater independence, reduce hospitalizations, and support long-term recovery. Please enjoy these stories that celebrate the passion, innovation, and commitment of our Medical Teams.

BHRS Pharmacy Team: Your Go-To for Seamless Medication Support

When you have a medication question, who ya gonna call? The BHRS pharmacy team! Our small team coordinates client pharmacy benefits with a large network of local pharmacies, fielding questions including insurance coverage, prior authorizations and delivery of medications. Working with both BHRS clinics and partner agencies, we aim to ensure that our clients get their medications in a timely fashion and pay the lowest fees.

In a typical month we receive up to 200 inquiries, problem solving eligibility, copay and formulary (list of prescription drugs that a health insurance plan covers) issues. When prior authorizations are required by MediCal or Part D Plans, we help prescribers initiate them and track their progress. When our dual Medi-Cal and Medicare clients enroll in the CareAdvantage program, our team works closely with Health Plan of San Mateo to approve prior authorizations, as well as help clients with missing medications or vacation overrides. In addition, physicians and nurses often seek our consultation on medication related questions such as adverse reactions, dosing strategies, drug interactions and drug class comparisons. Our pharmacists also conduct complex case reviews and teach psychopharmacology, the use of medication in treating mental health conditions. All new psychotropic agents or formulations receive comprehensive review from our team and are presented at the Pharmacy and Therapeutics (P&T) committee, where we actively co-lead to review practice guidelines, update medical policies and optimize our formulary.

As the opioid epidemic rages on and overdose deaths rates climb, our team is also dedicated to train BHRS staff and partners on the use of naloxone nasal spray. We facilitate the acquisition and distribution of naloxone and fentanyl strips as widely as possible. The team includes Barbara Liang-Krukar, Pharm D, Pharmacy Manager, Rukhsana Siddiqi, Pharm D, Clinical Pharmacist, and Medical Office Specialists Mae Sales, Theresa Murray-Laden and Vy Le. For any questions or inquiries, please email hs_bhirs_pharmacy@smcgov.org.

By Barbara Liang-Krukar, PharmD, BHRS Pharmacy Manager.

Innovative Integration: Primary Care, Mental Health and Substance Use Treatment

In 1995, Bob Cabaj envisioned a program that would integrate mental health care with primary care. Inspired by the set up in Daly City where North County Mental Health clinic is on the floor above the Daly City Health Center, Primacy Care Interface (PCI) began. The program grew from four members in 1998 to seven in 2008, now 30 years later, there are 25 members on this multi-disciplinary team of prescribers, therapists and case managers who focus on mental health and substance use in youth and adults. Embedded in five medical clinics throughout the county (Fair Oaks Health Center, Daly City Health Center, South San Francisco Clinic, Sequoia Teen Wellness Center, and San Mateo Medical Center), the PCI team takes a holistic approach to patient care, striving to reduce stigma around mental health and medication assisted therapy (MAT), and increase access to care for underserved populations. This approach has fostered close partnerships, educated primary care providers, and kept patients engaged with their medical care.

The team provides care for patients with moderate to severe mental illness and substance use disorders within their regular medical setting. Patients are provided eight to ten brief therapy sessions and medication management, and they are either referred back to their Primary Care Provider or are connected to a BHRS regional clinic or community partner for more comprehensive or long-term care if needed. For those with both mental illness and substance use issues, the team offers more intense case management to help with substance abuse management, harm reduction, and MAT options. Trauma-informed therapy models such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), family therapy and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) are used. This outstanding team is led by Supervising Psychiatrist Monika Chaudhry, MD, Supervising Mental Health Clinician Elizabeth Alvarez, LMFT, and Program Specialist, Christina Vasquez, LCSW, who have expertly guided the team through transitioning to EPIC (an electronic health record system) over the last year. Embodying the BHRS mission of collaboration and innovation, the growth of PCI is celebrated as a model for other programs.



- PCI received approximately **2,500** referrals last year and provided **19,118** patient interactions.
- **88%** of patients have shown improved functioning after interventions.

By **Monika Chaudhry, MD**, Supervising Psychiatrist and **Elizabeth Alvarez, LMFT**, Supervising Mental Health Clinician.

Psychiatry Residents Make Meaningful Contributions Locally and Beyond

Aligned with the mission of the BHRS Psychiatry Residency Program, we aim to teach residents how to advance health and social equity for all people in San Mateo County. One way residents achieve this is by engaging in community-focused projects. Over the years, residents have taken leading roles in the development and management of a number of services and projects within the county. For example, several years ago, early in his residency, Anthony Bautista, MD, decided to put his Master of Public Health skills to work by helping to create an alternative to hospitalization by establishing a crisis respite facility, which offers short-term, residential care for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. He conducted research, presented the findings to behavioral health leadership, participated in the selection committee for various agency's proposals, and did site visits. Along with contributions from others, his project eventually became Serenity House, pictured right.



Connie Chen, MD, co-chaired the Chinese Health Initiative during her residency and, after completing an addiction medicine fellowship, helped establish the Co-Occurring Consult Group upon returning to BHRS. The Group, which kicked off June 3, provides resources to BHRS staff for co-occurring substance use and mental health care and case consultation with Alcohol and Other Drug experts. Additionally, with support from the IMAT team, our residents were integral in organizing the Mental Health Equity and Advocacy Roundtable (MHEART), which focused on the interactions of mental health, addiction and incarceration.

Residents also engage in community-focused educational projects. Through the Health Ambassadors Program for Youth (HAP-Y), they educate local high school students to become community advocates. On June 14, Residency Director Brendan Scherer and resident Megan McGinnis, DO, presented at an online residency fair for medical students, where one attendee spoke about how HAP-Y influenced her path into medicine and her desire to return to the area to be a local doctor. Residents have also presented on substance use and mental health at the College of San Mateo and taught ethics at Santa Clara University.

Several residents have developed a monthly class at the Central County clinic to teach cooking skills, explore the relationship between food and mental health, and foster a supportive community. Additionally, some residents have goals that extend beyond work with the County, establishing community focused non-profits. One resident, who co-founded Humans in Harmony, led a meaningful project where music and song were collaboratively created with residents of Canyon Oaks Youth Center. Another first-year resident developed Nunchi Health, a non-profit that delivers free mental health services to youth worldwide. The BHRS residents are making a real difference by driving change, advancing health and social equity in San Mateo County and beyond through impactful projects and leadership.

By Brendan Scherer, MD, Program Director, Psychiatry Residency Training Program.

Puente Clinic Bridges Care for Nonverbal Clients

A client at the intersection between mental illness and intellectual disability who is also unable to communicate themselves is one of the most difficult cases a clinician could face. It can also be one of the most gratifying. The staff of the Puente Clinic serves that population every day. The Puente Clinic offers mental health services for developmentally disabled clients by bridging resources from BHRS, Golden Gate Regional Center (GGRC) and Health Plan of San Mateo (HPSM). Originally created in 2010 with one psychiatrist (BHRS' own Nabeela Rahman, MD) who worked three days per week, the Puente team has now grown considerably. The Puente Clinic now serves about 250 clients and is staffed with one full-time social worker, three psychiatrists and one half-time nurse practitioner. Since COVID-19, the Puente team have also expanded services to clients in group homes and day programs.

Puente's clients require extensive coordination with the Golden Gate Regional Center (a nonprofit organization serving individuals with developmental disabilities in the Bay Area), care homes, family members and conservators. Issues around consent to treatment are particularly difficult in the Puente population and even something as simple as changing a client's medication might take two to three hours to coordinate.

Clients referred to Puente must meet all the following criteria:

1. Must have Medi-Cal as their primary insurance (not Medicare).
2. Must be accepted / connected to Golden Gate Regional Center.
3. Must be nonverbal, meaning that the client cannot answer yes / no questions in a coherent manner.



The Puente Clinic is located at 1950 Alameda de las Pulgas. Please contact Marcia Ewing, LCSW at mewing1@smcgov.org if you have any other questions about Puente.

By Peter Dell, MD, Deputy Medical Director.

Celebrating One Year of Care Court

July marks one year of the CARE Court program in San Mateo County! This evidence-based program connects eligible adults in crisis to a CARE Agreement or Plan, which may include comprehensive treatment, housing, and supportive services for up to 24 months.

Achievements in the past year include:

- 58 petitions / respondents served
- 17 CARE Agreements + 1 CARE Plan reached
- 17 dismissals without prejudice (nearly half were connected to treatment!)

Visit smchealth.org/care for more information.