

Contributions of Psychologists to Treatment of Substance Use Disorder in the Uniform Mental Health Services Package

John P. Allen, PhD, MPA
Associate Chief Consultant, Addictive
Disorders
Office of Mental Health Services VHA

Four Key Domains of VA Services for Substance Use Disorders

- Assessment and Treatment Planning
- Brief Intervention
- Treatment of Dual Diagnosis
- Employment of Evidence-Based Treatments

Assessment and Treatment Planning

- Wide range of formal assessment instruments are available for substance use disorder treatment.
- Clinical psychologists have unique expertise in selecting assessment measures, interpreting results, and translating findings into treatment plans specific to the needs and coping skills of patients.

Brief Intervention

- Much of the harm associated with alcohol use results from drinking at risky levels, without dependence or abuse. Heavy drinking is especially common among males 17 to 23.
- Even brief interventions can assist these patients and are cost-effective.
- The putative “active ingredients” of brief intervention include rapport, individualized feedback, self-monitoring, enhance sense of self efficacy, and recognition of when referral is needed. The professional training of psychologists includes development of these skills.

Treatment of Dual Diagnosis

- Substance use disorders and other mental health problems often occur in combination. Treatment for the two conditions should be integrated or closely coordinated.
- Providing effective care for dual diagnosis patients is quite complex and requires a high level of clinical expertise as developed by the training and experience of psychologists.

Evidence-Based Treatment

- VA policy on treatment of substance use disorders requires that *evidence-based* psychosocial treatments and pharmacotherapies be available and that patients be actively involved in development of their treatment plans and given choices.
- Understanding of research findings and remaining current on the literature are fundamental skills developed by the training of psychologists.