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

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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.