

Bringing 'choice' to behavioral health

By LARRY HENDRICKS
Assistant City Editor
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Alicia is getting counseling.

"I have a problem with alcoholism," she said, preferring not to disclose her last name. She likes the outpatient counseling services at Southwest Behavioral Health Services and appreciates the intimate surroundings.

In the future, she plans to attend family counseling as well.

In an attempt to offer more choices to people needing behavioral health services in the region, the Northern Arizona Regional Behavioral Health Authority provided SBHS with enough funds to open clinics in five cities.

Mick Pattinson, CEO at NARBHA, said the state's Division of Behavioral Health Services decided to encourage the development of family and individual consumer choice in Mohave, Yavapai and Coconino counties.

Behavioral health professionals met with consumers who are eligible for public health insurance like Title 19 and Medicaid in the three counties, Pattinson added.

"They were requesting that we begin to develop additional choice," Pattinson said.

MORE PATIENT VISITS

More places to go to get services increases patient utilization in communities, Pattinson said.

So a committee made up of consumers and family members who receive behavioral health services and NARBHA staff picked SBHS to open offices in each of the three regions.

Heath Kilgore, vice president of crisis recovery services at SBHS, said NARBHA awarded the agency \$5 million to open offices in Flagstaff, Prescott, Bullhead City, Kingman and Lake Havasu City.

The offices in Flagstaff, Bullhead City and Prescott have already opened, Kilgore said. The Flagstaff office has been budgeted \$1 million for the first year of operation to serve up to 500 consumers.

Trisha McMahon, program coordinator at the Flagstaff office, said currently only adults are receiving services in Flagstaff, but as funding develops, more services will come online.

Since opening in late August, the Flagstaff clinic has enrolled 40 patients and has four full-time employees, McMahon said.

Currently, the clinic offers:

- Individual, group and family counseling
- Substance abuse services
- Psychiatric care
- Skills training
- Case management

ADDICTIONS AND MENTAL ILLNESS

Patients have problems that include addictions and severe mental illness, McMahon added.

"It's our intention to have clinics here similar to ones in Phoenix," McMahon said, adding that day treatment, residential treatment and crisis units could be on the horizon if SBHS receives the funding.

As for business shifting from one behavioral health provider to another, Pattinson said some consumers will be moving to new providers.

He added, though, that all behavioral health providers in Flagstaff are seeing an increase in numbers receiving services. When service options increase, people who otherwise would not have been able to get services can. Pattinson also said that during hard economic times, Title 19 and Medicaid numbers tend to increase.

NARBHA, through the Arizona Department of Health Services, implements, funds and monitors behavioral health services in the northern part of the state, according to information from NARBHA.

NARBHA distributes about \$140 million in contracts for behavioral health services in northern Arizona annually and serves about 700,000 people.

For more information on SBHS, visit www.sbhservices.org. For more information on NARBHA, visit www.narbha.org.

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Southwest Behavioral Health Services

Hours: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday (or by appointment)

The clinic in Flagstaff is located at 1515 E. Cedar Ave., Suite. B2, B3 and B4.

Telephone: 779-4550.