Helping Patients Access Mental Health, Substance Abuse Treatment

The Challenge: Nationally, those in need of mental health or substance abuse treatment too often do not receive treatment. More than 60 percent of adults with a diagnosable disorder and 70 percent of children needing treatment do not receive mental health services. Public and private insurance coverage for mental health treatment often is unfairly limited, terminated or denied. Numerous changes to the health insurance system have opened access to mental health treatment for people who did not previously have coverage. ABC seeks to educate patients about their options.

Project Goal: This project sought to better understand and remove barriers for patients seeking access to mental health and substance abuse treatment. ABC for Rural Health worked with three Polk County mental health clinics to document, describe and model a program that assures full access regardless of the patient’s age, disability, health or economic status.

Results: The project uncovered private insurance problems with the Mental Health Parity and with the Provider Non-Discrimination sections of the Affordable Care Act and uncovered policy problems with the delivery of Wisconsin Medicaid. The effort also helped patients gain eligibility for BadgerCare Plus, Medicaid and insurance through the Affordable Care Act. In addition, the project underscored the importance of benefits counseling and of empowering clinic staff members to educate patients about their options. ABC also developed an online Behavioral Health Screener, which helps patients find health insurance programs or policies.