New initiative engages staff around social determinants of health

The Alliance Community Relations staff and Employee Engagement Committee recently launched Alliance CARES, an initiative designed to engage employees around particular topics surrounding social determinants of health.

Social determinants are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. Studies have shown that while clinical care interventions are essential, a broad range of social, economic, and environmental factors shape individuals’ opportunities and barriers to receiving care and engaging in healthy behaviors.

“Things like housing, transportation so they can get to services and supports, nutritional needs, and resources to buy essentials, including medicine, all play a role in determining health outcomes,” said Ann Oshel, Alliance Senior Vice President of Community Relations.

Alliance Cares features learning opportunities in the form of “Lunch and Learns,” staff and social media information, and activities designed to engage staff in addressing those needs in our communities.

The first CARES campaign looked at social isolation and loneliness, which can negatively affect both physical and mental health and increases the risk of mortality. Social isolation, the lack of interaction with others on a regular or consistent basis, carries the same degree of health risk as smoking cigarettes, and doubles that of obesity. It is also a big risk factor for major depression as well as substance use disorders and addiction.

For the first Alliance Cares activity in February, staff at Alliance’s home and community offices created Valentine’s Day cards which were delivered to senior citizens at care facilities and senior centers. In addition, a Lunch and Learn in Cumberland County featured a talk about social isolation and loneliness.

The second quarter of Alliance cares will focus on food insecurity.
Alliance launches opioid action website

In March Alliance launched the Alliance Alliance For Action on Opioids website (allianceforaction.org), a resource to help individuals, family members, and professionals take small but important steps in their lives and work to help stem the tide of the opioid epidemic.

Alliance for Action is targeted to individuals and families as well as health care providers, including pharmacists, and focuses on actions people can take against the opioid epidemic at home, or at work in the case of health care professionals.

The website highlights steps that may prevent opioid misuse and overdose deaths, such as locking up prescription drugs and properly disposing of leftover medications, learning how to prevent overdose deaths with naloxone, and recognizing the red flags of opioid misuse and addiction. It also presents resources to help people learn about smart pain management, recovery and treatment options.

For pharmacists and other health care providers Alliance For Action also advises learning to conduct “SBIRT” or “Screening, Brief Intervention And Referral To Treatment,” an early intervention approach to help people with, or at risk of developing, substance use disorders before they need specialized treatment. The website also provides links to opioid-related continuing education and encourages professionals to stay current on prevention, screening and treatment knowledge and learn how to advise patients about naloxone and smart pain management.

“We want pharmacists and providers to understand opioid addiction as a chronic, preventable and treatable disease, and to increase awareness of the risk of opioids and possible drug interactions,” said Alliance Clinical Pharmacist Vera Reinstein. “We also want them to recognize the value of offering naloxone to people identified as high-risk for opioid overdose.”

Opioid overdoses claim the lives of nearly four North Carolinians every day and overdose deaths have increased by nearly 400 percent over the past 16 years, according to the NC Department of Justice. The US Centers for Disease Control reports that on average, 115 Americans die from opioid overdoses every day.

In North Carolina, Alliance is at the forefront of efforts to help stem the tide. When data analytics, utilization management and peer case reviews identified a pattern of risky prescribing of benzodiazepines and opioids, Alliance staff worked with providers to design and implement a set of tiered responses that aligns closely with the state’s plan to reduce prescription drug misuse.

Alliance also offers ongoing technical assistance for members of its provider network and provides education on appropriate best practice prescribing guidelines and how to assess and effectively treat opioid use disorders.

In addition, Alliance invested $100,000 to supply naloxone free of charge to community providers as well as consumers with known addictions and their families, along with education on how to use it. Alliance includes instruction in the use of naloxone in its Crisis Intervention Team training for law enforcement officers and other first responders and supplied naloxone to the Wake County Sheriff’s Office and the TASC program in Cumberland County.
An Alliance-funded behavioral health urgent care clinic, operated by Carolina Outreach in Durham, is filling a gap in services for those with mental health needs and substance use disorders.

The goal of the urgent care is to connect people with behavioral health care and services before urgent situations become crises. Without the urgent care center, someone suffering from depression, acute anxiety or substance abuse problems, or who has a child with behavioral issues in school, might have to wait weeks for an appointment or go to a hospital emergency department, which is not the best place for them to get help.

Alliance Director of Hospital Relations Margaret Brunson said the urgent care clinic is part of Alliance’s vision of creating more accessible behavioral health services. “We were ready to expand the continuum of care for our community and looking at open access, and an urgent care facility was a logical step,” Brunson said. “We decided to work with Carolina Outreach because they were already operating a walk-in clinic in Durham, so this was a natural extension of that model.”

Clinic staff see people in a variety of situations, including people who need a medication refill to remain stable but face a wait to see their regular provider, people in acute psychological distress, and people seeking urgent assistance with a substance use disorder. The clinic has also been used by school staff to get quick help for youths in distress, and by parents who are required to get psychiatric assessments for children before they are allowed back in school but face a long wait for an appointment at a traditional mental health practice.

A visit to the urgent care averages about two hours, and begins with a nursing assessment and a drug and alcohol screening to assess whether an individual is physically stable, followed by a crisis assessment to determine what services are appropriate. Clinic staff also do an assessment of social determinants, such as housing, food security and social support, to determine whether an individual needs to be connected with other services to maintain stability.

On average, 89 percent of the individuals assessed are seen by a physician on the same day and 72 percent are discharged with a prescription. Before discharge all individuals are either referred back to their primary care and/or existing behavioral health provider or linked to a new behavioral health provider with a scheduled appointment.

“We are filling a gap in the crisis continuum that has existed for far too long in our community,” said Marissa Holsten, the clinic and urgent care manager for Carolina Outreach. “We can help people receive the right care before or as they go into crisis to prevent them from reaching that edge where they need a higher level of care.”

Holsten said the clinic served on average almost 100 people a month during its first six months. She said that at current staffing levels the clinic could serve 70 to 75 people a week and with increased staffing they could serve up to 100 per week.

The clinic is designed to serve individuals with Medicaid or those uninsured within Alliance’s service area of Durham, Wake, Cumberland, and Johnston counties. The facility is not currently able to accept private insurance, however individuals who are privately insured can pay an out-of-pocket fee for services.
Alliance is using innovative, evidence-based services and supports to holistically meet the needs of the people we serve. Our vision for the future of healthcare in North Carolina includes data-driven approaches that provide better life outcomes and cost-efficient use of the public funding entrusted to us.

As part of our future-focused mission, we are pioneering the application of predictive analytics to behavioral healthcare in North Carolina. The project, a partnership with Duke University researchers, uses early intervention with community-based mental health services to help young people avoid the need for crisis services, such as emergency and inpatient psychiatric care.

The initiative is to develop a statistical model using health insurance claims to generate real-time identification of youth at risk for admission to emergency departments or inpatient psychiatric facilities within the subsequent three months. Through early detection, Alliance can leverage care coordination and resources to address social determinants, helping children and families engage in community-based behavioral health services. Through engagement with these community-based services, youth may avoid crises and remain with their families and in their communities while receiving care. Helping youth remain with their families and in their communities of origin is a priority for all, and may support higher quality care and cost savings for the system. The resulting predictive model and associated data analysis will be re-used in a number of applications that will help identify and intervene with youth at risk for needing treatment in a variety of out-of-home settings.

The application of predictive modeling to behavioral health care has the potential to dramatically change the way services are delivered. Prior to the transition of public service agencies to electronic record keeping, it has been relatively difficult to identify individuals across the population with risk factors for poor behavioral health outcomes. Thus, individuals often present when they are in crisis, at a time when expensive and restrictive services such as inpatient psychiatric treatment are the only options. Given that we now have access to large datasets across our public systems, we can apply advanced statistics to identify patterns predicting negative outcomes that we want to prevent (or positive outcomes that we want to support). Data from these public systems are updated continually, and the statistical models can be automated and applied repeatedly as the public data systems are updated. Thus, we can survey our population to identify risk on a much larger scale, and these efforts require fewer resources compared to before.

“Most importantly, predictive models may support earlier intervention, at a time when behavioral health services are most likely to be effective and community-based,” said Dr. Katherine Hobbs Knutson, Alliance CMO. “Through these methods, we may improve efficiency of population-based service delivery, as effective treatments – at the right ‘dose’ – can be targeted according to the identified risk.”

At Alliance, these predictive models are applied to our entire Medicaid and state-funding eligible population, representing approximately 400,000 individuals across our four counties. By replacing treatment in emergency departments and inpatient settings with evidence-based services in the community, we may realize substantial savings for our public system. These dollars may be reinvested, thus continuing to expand access to care across our region.
I/DD Care Coordinators certified

As part of our effort to build an even stronger intellectual and developmental disability care coordination team, 30 Alliance Care Coordinators recently received certification by the National Academy of Certified Care Managers. The NACCM certification, which requires education, training, supervised work experience and a rigorous exam, demonstrates competency in key work areas including assessment of client strengths, needs and preferences, writing goals and implementing a plan of care and managing and monitoring services and ongoing care needs.

“A national certification in care management for I/DD care coordination enriches the knowledge base of our staff in keeping with Alliance’s mission to address whole person care, said Alliance Director of I/DD Care Coordination Jeff Payne.

In addition, two IDD Care Coordinators are currently seeking certification as Dual Diagnosis Specialists through the National Association on Dual Diagnosis (NADD), and three Care Coordinators maintained national certification as a Certified Brain Injury Specialists to understand evidenced-based practices to better serve members who have survived a traumatic brain injury. Three additional Care Coordinators are enrolled to take their NACCM exam in 2018.

Talking Points

What is Housing First?

Alliance Senior VP of Community Relations Ann Oshel will be presenting on “Realizing the Potential of Olmstead Using a Housing First Approach” at the Housing First Partners Conference on April 11. What exactly do we mean when we talk about Alliance’s dedication to Housing First?

★ Housing First is an evidence-based intervention premised upon the idea that helping homeless people with serious mental illness and substance use disorders get secure shelter first increases their chances of achieving stability. This is in contrast to programs that require achievement of sobriety or regular psychiatric care as preconditions to permanent housing.

★ People with mental and/or substance use disorders can be particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless or being precariously housed. In January 2016, one in five people experiencing homelessness had a serious mental illness, and a similar percentage had a chronic substance use disorder. (Read more at SAMHSA’s Homelessness and Housing page.)

★ Housing First initiatives move individuals directly into permanent supportive housing that offers services designed to help them succeed.

“Back in the early days of Housing First it was called ‘Housing First, Housing Plus.’ Access to housing is the platform for recovery, and you need the support side, the services that are the “plus” side of housing, to make it successful,” Oshel said.

We believe that housing is a platform that improves an individual’s quality of life, allows them to pursue their own goals and dreams, and serves as a foundation for their recovery.
Alliance Behavioral Healthcare’s School-Based Care Coordination initiative received a “Program of Excellence” award in December 2017 from the NC Council of Community Programs for partnerships to improve services recently.

The SPCC initiative is an innovative partnership between Alliance and the Wake County Public School System to create safer learning environments and better educational outcomes by addressing the mental health, behavioral and social needs of children attending Wake County schools.

Alliance’s Care Coordinators in the schools use a “wraparound” model to improve student connections with the services they need to reduce the severity of their behavioral health symptoms. In turn, student absences are reduced and academic performance improves. The initiative aims to bridge the gap between families, schools and behavioral health resources and give children and their families a voice in navigating the behavioral and educational systems.

The initiative currently provides care coordination in several areas. One effort promotes continuity of care for children transitioning back into schools from psychiatric residential treatment facilities. Others identify and support children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, identify young children entering school who may need intervention and arrange services for students who need help for existing problems and prevention of more severe problems.

One program unique in North Carolina tailors “diversion plans” for teens accused of minor crimes. The SBCC teen diversion program has helped 93 teens accused of committing minor offenses at school avoid criminal charges or arrest records, which has allowed some keep their college scholarship offers or retain their eligibility to join the military.

During the 2016-17 fiscal year the SBCC initiative served a total of 414 children across all programs.

“It is critical that parents, school staff and community care providers come together to support all of the students in our care, but especially those students that must have collaborative support to navigate troubling life circumstances,” said Karen Hamilton, Wake County Public School System’s assistant superintendent for special education services. “The WCPSS/Wake County Government and Alliance collaborative allows our community to provide aligned, coherent efforts that strengthen families and the school families of students facing unique struggles. I look forward to the future where we increase the scope and size of our collaboration and reach even more children and families!” Ms. Hamilton said.

“The School-Based Care Coordination initiative is just one example of Alliance’s efforts to reach into our communities to the places where we can be proactive in identifying people who are at risk of the negative impact of behavioral health challenges,” said Dr. Beth Melcher, Alliance Executive Vice president—Care Management.
As part of its commitment to stemming the tide of opiate addiction and misuse of prescription pain medications, Alliance is participating in the NC Lock Your Meds educational campaign. NC Lock Your Meds is part of a national multi-media campaign produced by National Family Partnership designed to reduce prescription drug abuse by making adults aware that they may be the “unwitting suppliers” of prescription medications being used in unintended ways, especially by young people.

Many people who misuse prescription medications get them from family and friends. Only five percent of children who misuse prescription medications say they get them from a stranger or a drug dealer.

The Lock Your Meds campaign aims to educate people about the importance of securing medications to prevent them from being accessed by children, family members or visitors. The project involves distributing promotional materials and information, as well as a limited number of medicine lockboxes, to raise awareness of the issue.

“She gets her hair from her mom. Her eyes from her dad. And her drugs from her grandma’s purse,” reads one poster depicting a teen girl. Another features a teen boy and reads “He gets his music online. His t-shirts at the mall. And his drugs from his mom’s purse.

The Lock Your Meds materials aim to make adults aware of the need to secure prescription medications.

Care Coordination team is distributing the lockboxes to individuals being discharged from facilities who are prescribed opioids and may be transient or have children. Alliance is also disseminating other information via its robust online and social media channels.

“Locking up medications is a very effective deterrent to medicine theft and misuse that may lead to prescription drug addiction,” said Alliance Clinical Pharmacist Dr. Vera Reinstein. “Securing the medications you are currently taking and properly disposing of the ones you no longer need can keep you from becoming an accidental dealer.”

Surveys have found that every day more than 1,700 children and young adults begin experimenting with prescription drugs, ranging from pain relievers and depressants to stimulants and over-the-counter medicine. Legally prescribed painkillers are often a precursor to drug use disorders, addiction and overdoses.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 42,000 Americans died of opioid overdoses in 2016, a 28 percent increase over 2015. Every day nearly four North Carolinians die from a medication or drug overdose. The number of opioid overdose deaths in North Carolina increased from 150 in 1999 to 1,518 in 2016. Opioid deaths across the Alliance region have shown an increase of 526 percent from 1999 to 2016.

The Lock Your Meds campaign is supported by the NC Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services with funding from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and federal grants.
An expression of gratitude for what alliance staff do each and every day

Alliance staff are a dedicated and hardworking group of people! On Friday, March 2, 2018, Alliance offices paused to recognize and honor our employees’ commitment to Alliance and the people we serve. Staff were treated to lunch and mini spa treatments, and competed for gold in office “Olympic” games, including chair races, badge toss, rubber-band archery and mental gymnastics. There was also a display of employee artwork.

What Powers Us? Read the celebration of our values and the innovative and enthusiastic people who POWER Alliance at www.flipgorilla.com/p/25441453291342237/show.
Grow your career at Alliance

The Opportunity.

At Alliance Behavioral Healthcare our mission is to improve the health and well-being of the people we serve by ensuring highly effective, community-based support and care. Our work is driven by dedication and an understanding of the importance of community in each of our lives. We actively seek meaningful and diverse partnerships to improve services and systems. Valuing communication and cooperation between team members and departments ensures the delivery of needed services and support.

As we move forward in growth to serve our community, we seek out candidates who are dedicated and aligned with our core values: accountability, integrity, collaboration, compassion, dignity, respect, and innovation.

People who come to work for Alliance become part of an outstanding team of innovative and caring professionals dedicated to the principles of recovery and self-determination, a team committed to enhancing the quality of life for the thousands who benefit from the behavioral health services we manage.

Come join us in our vision to be a service leader and an employer of choice in transforming the delivery of whole person care in the public sector.

Here’s Why.

- Rich benefits (medical, dental, vision, disability, LGERS and 401(k), Competitive vacation package, holiday and sick leave)
- Direct industry experience & presence
- Internal growth & development opportunities/training
- Employee appreciation & recognition
- Opportunity to work with committed professionals

Division Job Openings

Care Management — Transition to Community Living Manger: [https://www.appone.com/MainInfoReq.asp?R_ID=1895252](https://www.appone.com/MainInfoReq.asp?R_ID=1895252)


For a complete list of our job opportunities, please visit our career’s page at [https://www.alliancebhc.org/about-alliance/careers/](https://www.alliancebhc.org/about-alliance/careers/). Launch our online Candidate Portal by clicking inside the box and search for jobs.

Internal applicants are encouraged to apply via the Intranet under Departments > HR > Working at Alliance-Internal.

Make healthy choices

For many people, eating on the go can be a necessity at times. But if you are watching your weight or are just concerned with healthy eating, keeping those meals healthy can be a challenge. The good news is that usually there are healthier options at every restaurant, even at fast-food places. By following some simple guidelines, you can enjoy eating out and still have a healthy diet.

Click the image at left for a downloadable and printable guide to good eating on the go.
Take Back Day

Wake
May 22: Mental WELLness Matters Dinner, 6 – 8 pm.
WakeMed Hospital-Andrews Center 3000 New Bern Ave, Raleigh, NC 27610
For registration information contact Clarette Glenn, cglenn@alliancebhc.org or 919-651-8704

Cumberland
May 9: Child Mental Health Awareness Luncheon, 11:30 am – 2 pm.
Cumberland County Department of Social Services 1225 Ramsey St Fayetteville 28301
For registration information contact Sharon Glover, sglover@alliancebhc.org or 910-491-4813

Johnston
May 14: System of Care Learning Institute, 10 am – 2 pm.
Johnson Medical Mall 514 North Brightleaf Blvd Smithfield NC 27577
For registration information contact Sharon Glover, sglover@alliancebhc.org or 910-491-4813
Hope4NC Wraps Up in Cumberland County

Project provided support and assistance referrals to people affected by Hurricane Matthew

The Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program, also known as Hope4NC, wrapped up at the end of 2017, having touched the lives of more than 14,000 Cumberland County residents affected by the destruction and flooding of Hurricane Matthew.

Alliance Behavioral Healthcare managed the project and, working with private, non-profit human services agency Action Pathways, deployed five outreach teams who canvassed neighborhoods, hotels, rentals and shelters to provide disaster crisis counseling to those affected by the flood.

The project, a partnership with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), offered short-term interventions that included coping strategies and emotional support to help disaster survivors manage the stress of their situations.

Outreach teams interacted with people affected by the storm through presentations and group encounters, neighborhood canvassing, telephone, email and other means, providing crisis counseling to 715 individuals and providing 484 referrals for further care.

“Without the support of the teams and community education most people would not have known where to go for help,” said Alliance Senior Vice President for Community Relations Ann Oshel. “Hope4NC also offered technical assistance to help providers and community organizations better understand how to access mental health services, which will provide ongoing referrals now that grant funds have ended.”

While the program did not provide home repairs, outreach counselors referred citizens to a variety of community resources that could assist people in putting their lives and homes back together. Many residents were also referred to organizations that could provide assistance with behavioral or mental health care, affordable housing, legal assistance, furniture and clothing.

In many cases, residents struggling with hardships were just happy to have someone listen to and empathize with them. “It can be devastating to lose everything and still have the daily struggle of living outside of your home many months later,” says Disaster Recovery Coordinator Laressa Witt. “Added to the financial burden of starting all over, it can be very stressful for families.”

Individuals who still need assistance can call Alliance’s toll-free, 24-hour Access and Information Center at 800-735-2962.