Voice and Choice in Wellness and Recovery

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Objectives for Today’s Talk

– Place the civil rights of individuals with disabilities and co-occurring mental health disorders on your social justice agenda
– Consider ways to promote Voice and Choice within activities that advance mental health wellness and recovery
Treatments, supports and services?

Considerations:
- Independence
- Interdependence
- Choice
- Voice
- Safety
How to balance duty to care with support for choice, voice and self-determination

- We are trained to assist vulnerable individuals and act in ways that help keep them safe, but...
- Are we providing opportunities for choice, self-expression and self-determination?
- Do behavioral health challenges and the need for care preclude the rights of individuals to live in accordance with their values and preferences?
Person-centered versus Illness-centered care

- Driven by strengths and values rather than by diagnosis
  ✓ Holistic care
  ✓ Shared decision making
  ✓ Helps individuals reach their valued health outcomes
  ✓ Considers Quality of Life
The Issues (or at least some of them...)

- **Access** to competent providers who understand the multiple challenges of developmental disorders and co-occurring mental illness
  - Diagnostic overshadowing that obscures recognition of *bona fide* mental health disorder
  - Limited functional communication which creates barriers to accurate assessment and to tailoring care to individual preferences and needs
  - Geographic Location and associated problems with accessing qualified providers
- **Parity**
  - Behavioral health is still not considered to be on a par with medical services
- **Affordability**
  - Also an “access issue,” insofar as being able to pay for needed care. Many competent providers are only accessible via out-of-pocket payment for their services
Voice in Wellness and Recovery
Functional Communication

- Individuals with limited language skills need opportunities to express their wants, needs and preferences
- Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS)
- Communication Boards
- Pictorial Calendars
- Translators
The Language of Wellness

- Mental health has its own unique jargon
- Provide individuals, their families and staff with:
  - information about mental health disorders,
  - explanations of medications,
  - develop a list of questions to discuss with the health care provider
- Review emergency protocols if relevant and discuss accessing the acute care system [http://www.sccatnj.org/news_information.htm](http://www.sccatnj.org/news_information.htm)
Giving Voice to Culture and Tradition

- Different belief systems regarding psychiatry and non-medical approaches to mental health
- Different beliefs about the nature of mental health disorders
- What is the family value system around mental health wellbeing?
Choice in Wellness and Recovery
Personal Choice

- Does the individual know he/she has choices?
- Are individuals asked about their preferences for treatment and providers?
- Opportunities for choices should be included in every activity
- To what extent would providing individuals with choice lessen the likelihood of behavioral problems?
- The opportunity to voice preference or indicate preference should be encouraged in every activity
Navigating Wellness
Positive Routine

- Includes choice in activities
- Meaningful work and activity
- Balances necessary tasks with preferred activities
- Provides opportunities for social connection
- Provides opportunities for skills building
- Includes opportunities for exercise and movement
Skills Building Opportunities

- Life Skills training opportunities
  - ADLs to improve functional outcomes
- Social skills training opportunities
  - Social stories to improve social understanding
- Anger management
  - Coping skills
- Stress management
  - Relaxation techniques
Wellness and Recovery Advocacy

EDUCATE!

- Place Mental Health on the Civil Rights and Disabilities Agenda through trainings, seminars and events
- Provide individuals, their families and all members of the valued team with information about how dual diagnosis impacts everyday living
- Help all members of the valued team understand the stressors and hassles of everyday living with illness and recovery
- Help people navigate the acute care system in your state
Surround Yourself with Like-minded Associates…

- [http://www.sccatnj.org/news_information.htm](http://www.sccatnj.org/news_information.htm)
- Join the National Association for Dual Diagnosis [www.theNADD.org](http://www.theNADD.org)
- Lobby MCOs in your state to include practitioners with knowledge of dual diagnosis on their health panels
- Ring the Bell! [http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/bell](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/bell)