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Evaluation of the Points Incentive Program: A Contemporary Token Economy Program

Submitted by Jason Peer, PhD, Wendy Tenhula, PhD, & Joe Hassell, MA

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Research indicates that token economy interventions are effective strategies for increasing adaptive behaviors and enhancing recovery of functional abilities in people with schizophrenia (Dickerson et al., 2004). The Schizophrenia Patient Outcomes Research Team (Lehman et al., 2003) has recommended that these interventions be included in the treatment of people with schizophrenia in longer term care settings. In conjunction with Mental Health at the VAMHCS, the VISN 5 MIRECC has developed and implemented the Points Incentive Program (PIP), a token economy intervention provided to veterans with serious mental illness in an extended care inpatient setting at the Perry Point VAMC. Through this program, veterans earn points for successful demonstration of specific behaviors associated with adaptive social functioning (e.g., grooming and hygiene and other activities of daily living) and participation in rehabilitation related activities. These points can be redeemed for items or privileges of the veteran's choosing. After initial staff training and program development between November 2000 and November 2002, the program was integrated as part of standard treatment on the unit and has been in place since that time. Point earning data are collected and individual reports are generated and used by staff, in conjunction with other clinical information, to evaluate treatment progress and provide patients with feedback about their behavior on the unit.

How does the PIP work?

The PIP provides immediate positive reinforcement (in the form of points) for the performance of specified behaviors in three areas of unit functioning: activities of daily living, group attendance, and medication adherence. The PIP can also be individualized to

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WHAT IS A PEER SUPPORT TECHNICIAN?

Submitted by Karen Wilson, BSN, MHA



The Veterans Affairs Mental Health System is transforming itself into a Recovery focused system, and Peer Support Technicians are a part of that transformation. Peer Support Technicians (PSTs) are individuals who have personal experience with mental illness and Recovery. They know firsthand the struggles of living with a mental illness and are viable examples that Recovery is possible. PSTs are VA employees and part of the clinical team. They provide orientation to the Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Centers (PRRC) program, lead support, wellness and Recovery groups, attend treatment team meetings, accompany veterans to community activities, and provide resources and skills.

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address behaviors such as adherence to blood sugar monitoring and adherence to diabetic diet. Points are awarded for demonstrating target behaviors on the following scale: Full (4 points); Moderate (2 points); and No (0 points), for a total of 40 possible points per day. The awarding of points is paired with praise and encouragement from staff for a patient's efforts. The PIP also reinforces the sustained performance of these target behaviors through the use of a progressive level system that each afford veterans with different privileges. Finally, maladaptive behaviors such as property damage and physical or verbal aggression result in a loss of award level.

There is a fairly rapid response to the program with veterans earning a large proportion of possible points during the first 30 days

We are currently conducting a study that describes clinical response to and outcomes of the PIP. We have conducted chart reviews and tabulated clinical data (e.g., daily point earning data) from the PIP database for 164 veterans who were admitted to the program between 11/02 and 12/06, with at least a 30-day length of stay. Preliminary analyses of PIP data indicate that there is a fairly rapid response to the program with veterans earning a large proportion of possible points during the first 30 days and quickly earning level 3 privileges. Of note, there is a low frequency of level drops - 76.2% of veterans experience no level drops, 14.6% experience one, and 9.2% experience 2 or more.

We are also planning to evaluate the relationship of other clinical and demographic factors such as diagnosis, history of substance abuse, and previous psychiatric treatment to PIP response. Finally, we have also collected data on psychiatric service utilization such as outpatient mental health visits, emergency room visits and inpatient psychiatric hospitalizations during the year following discharge from the PIP in order to investigate outcomes. Data from this evaluation will be used to identify areas for potential modification and/or improvement in the PIP.

*Peer Support
Technicians have
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Recovery*

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The PST must complete a training and certification program that includes the competencies necessary to perform the peer support function. He or she must demonstrate the ability to support the Recovery of others from mental illness and/or substance use disorders. After the initial training, the PST furthers their education by meeting continuing educational requirements.

The VAMHCS will soon be hiring two PSTs, one for each of the PRRCs at the Baltimore and Perry Point VAMCs.

VISN-5 MIRECC Veterans Advisory Panel

Submitted by Alicia Lucksted, PhD

The VISN-5 MIRECC Veterans Advisory Panel is comprised of veterans with an interest in mental health topics who volunteer to give their opinions and suggestions about current and future MIRECC projects. Begun this past summer, the panel is scheduled to meet three to four times per year in the MIRECC conference room at the Baltimore VAMC.

At the inaugural meeting in August, 2008, four Veteran Advisors met with MIRECC staff to discuss what the MIRECC does and how the Panel will function. We agreed on strategies to interest more veterans in joining the group, and made plans to invite MIRECC researchers to give presentations at future meetings. This led to a productive discussion about staff attitudes and how they may influence veterans' feelings of trust and respect, which in turn may affect veteran's experiences with and use of various VA health services.

Since August, three additional veterans have joined the Panel. At our second meeting on October 8, 2008, Drs. Amy Drapalski and Rebecca Pasillas asked the group for help on



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the development of a Mental Health Recovery assessment. After talking about the uses and limitations, the Advisors offered thoughtful critique of the wording, intent, and meanings of individual items. Additionally, the Panel further discussed their opinions on staff attitudes and VA services. Finally, the MIRECC's annual External Advisory Meeting on November 3, 2008 was discussed, as Panel Advisors will be taking a role in it.

The next Veterans Advisory Panel will be held in January, 2009. We welcome additional veterans who want to join. If you are interested in volunteering or learning more, please contact Alicia Lucksted, PhD, at 410-706-3244 or Alicia.Lucksted@va.gov, or leave your name and contact information with Fran Broomall at the MIRECC front desk (suite 6A-160).

UPCOMING EVENTS

◆ Monthly SGA Consultation Seminar ◆

First Thursday of every month:

November 6, 2008 and December 4, 2008

1:00 - 2:00 PM

MIRECC conference room, BVA (6A-168)

or PPVA VTel conference room, Bldg 364 (C-110)

or call 800-767-1750, code 79846

There has been increasing concern, both within and outside of the VA, about the metabolic side effects of second generation antipsychotic medications (SGAs). VAMHCS clinicians are encouraged to bring their difficult or complicated SGA cases to this seminar for consultation and advice. Anyone can present a case or just ask questions in this informal setting, so please join us as we learn from the consultants and from each other. The consultants are Robert Buchanan, MD, from the MIRECC Psychopharmacology Clinic and Maryland Psychiatric Research Center, and Julie Kreyenbuhl, PhD, PharmD from the MIRECC.

◆ Living Healthy/Living Well Conference ◆

Saturday, October 25, 2008

8:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Perry Point VAMC

Join the VISN 5 MIRECC and staff at the Perry Point VA Medical Center for this half-day conference for veterans with mental illness and their families/caregivers. Lisa Dixon, MD, will discuss the co-occurrence of medical and mental health problems, Richard Goldberg, PhD, will present wellness strategies, and Don Thomas, RNC, will present a stress-reducing relaxation exercise. In addition, two consumers will discuss their own experiences with recovery and health issues.

For more information, contact Cynthia Clark, RNC, at 410-605-7298 or Cynthia.Clark2@va.gov.

◆ **Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP):
Putting the Recovery Model into Action** ◆

Monday, November 3, 2008
8:30 AM - 3:00 PM
Baltimore VAMC Auditorium

Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP) was featured in our June 2008 newsletter. The Chesapeake Health Education Program is now offering a one-day workshop for you to learn about this powerful and effective tool for the self-management of psychiatric symptoms. Building a WRAP offers people with psychiatric symptoms a structured system for monitoring, reducing, and eliminating symptoms through the empowerment of planned responses. Attendees will learn the concept of building a wellness toolbox and have a working knowledge of the six essential sections to a WRAP, including: a daily maintenance plan, triggers, early warning signs, when things are breaking down, crisis planning, and post-crisis planning.

For more information or to register, go to http://www.chepinc.org/upcoming_events or call 410-642-1195.

◆ **Annual Maryland Schizophrenia Conference** ◆
Maryland Psychiatric Research Center

Thursday, November 6, 2008
BWI Airport Marriott
1743 West Nursery Road, Baltimore

This year's conference will include talks on the development of the DSM-V, interpersonal psychotherapy, genetics, and what childhood studies tell us about schizophrenia. Continuing education credits are available for physicians, psychologists, social workers, nurses, counselors, pharmacists, and occupational and activity counselors.

For more information, or to register, go to http://trainingcenter.umaryland.edu/Pages/md_schizophrenia_conference.aspx

◆ **Recovery-Oriented Small Grants Program** ◆
Application Deadline: December 1, 2008

The VISN 5 MIRECC offers small grants to fund recovery-oriented clinical and educational innovations in response to the VA's Action Agenda to transform VA mental health services to a recovery model. This program especially encourages (but is not limited to) proposals such as: creating, adopting, launching or expanding recovery-oriented clinical or self-help projects, new programs to educate staff, veterans, and/or family members of veterans about mental health recovery models, or specific recovery-oriented services/programs.

For more information or to receive an application, please contact Alicia Lucksted, PhD, MIRECC Recovery Coordinator, at Alicia.Lucksted@va.gov, 410-706-3244.