



east bay community action program

Mental Health in Times of Crisis

Story by Catherine Norton, Development Associate

Staying connected to family, friends and the community is key during times of crisis. This is especially true for those dealing with mental health issues who can be overwhelmed with feelings of isolation and helplessness. While the COVID-19 crisis spills into summer, EBCAP's Behavioral Health program and its clinicians are well prepared to continue to meet the increased need for mental health and substance use services.

"We have definitely seen an increase in substance use and relapse in the community, including overdoses due to the COVID crisis," explains Amy Lagasse, EBCAP's Director of Outpatient and Emergency Services. Thankfully, services like EBCAP's suboxone (buprenorphine) program are available to provide much needed help to individuals with substance use disorder. EBCAP's suboxone program is a medication-assisted treatment (MAT) that helps suppress withdrawal symptoms and opioid cravings. Suboxone is very effective in helping individuals stay sober while reducing withdrawal side effects and curbing cravings that can lead to relapse.

As Lagasse explains, "EBCAP's MAT program provides psychiatry with suboxone prescribing and substance use counseling. Clients can also benefit by attending our virtual Recovery Center support groups, peer support services, and sober activities." EBCAP also offers other forms of MAT including Sublocade (buprenorphine extended release injection) and Vivitrol (extended release injectable Naltrexone).

Knowing that opioid dependence is challenging and complicated, EBCAP has found success in a holistic approach to treatment. This approach treats the whole person by considering their physical, emotional, and social well-being, not just their substance use disorder. To many, this has provided an opportunity for treatment success. Just ask Beth Donovan, Dual Diagnosis Clinician and EBCAP's Recovery Liaison. She has seen first-hand how effective the combination of counseling, education, and medical and social support systems is on individuals dealing with substance use disorders. "At EBCAP, we provide a more up and down level of care. We are able to connect clients with wrap around services that include a robust list of resources to help them on their recovery journey."

Donovan specializes in counseling women, not only helping them in their recovery, but also helping them deal with the underlying trauma of helplessness. She provides them support as they develop recovery support plans. "I work with clients and help them define goals, work on those goals, and see a future. I like to unlock what motivates a person and what it is that will increase their happiness," she relates. Part of the plan often involves MAT. She talks of how MAT has been successful in minimizing abuse and increasing functionality for clients. "It pairs well with counseling," explains Donovan. "Clients get their medication, plus they have someone guide them as they unlock their power and create a life filled with happiness and joy."

When asked if the current COVID-19 crisis has increased the number of people seeking counseling

services, Donovan explains that a crisis will often trigger a person's substance use disorder or mental health issues. Thanks to her ability to continue providing services via EBCAP's telehealth capabilities, she has not received requests for additional services from her clients. "Telemed has helped me stay connected with my clients and has actually reduced certain barriers to treatment like transportation issues, childcare issues, or work schedules."

Amy Lagasse elaborates further, "Telehealth has been phenomenal for behavioral health counseling. Both clients and clinicians love it." She explains how the standard no-show/cancellation rate for in-person therapy averages around 30 percent but has decreased to around 10 percent since EBCAP began offering telehealth services to clients. "Clients have been asking for telehealth for a long time prior to COVID. It offers so much more flexibility,"

As barriers to treatment are removed, clinicians are able to connect more frequently with clients who are struggling. "COVID-19 has caused emotional disturbance to almost everyone in our community to some capacity, so it is wonderful to be able to check in and connect more to our clients who have active mental health and substance use disorders and may be experiencing an increased need for support," Lagasse explains. "As we continue to see an increase in substance use and relapse, it's great that we can offer telehealth, as well as same-day suboxone in-takes." As Donovan states, "People really want to connect right now. They want to explore and do the deep work needed to help them through this difficult time."

If you or someone you know would like more information on EBCAP's Behavioral Health Services or if you would like information on EBCAP's Medication Assisted Treatment, call 401-246-1195 or visit www.ebcap.org

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