

POSTER ABSTRACTS

11th Annual HMO Research Network Conference

April 4-6, 2005 Santa Fe, NM

Mental Health 50

Continuity of Care, Relationships with Mental Health Providers, and Recovery from Severe Mental Illness

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Background: A substantial majority of individuals with serious mental illness make either a full recovery or function well and contribute to society, yet little is known about factors that foster or impede the recovery process. Good relationships with mental health care providers and continuity of care have been identified as potential facilitators of better outcomes, but continuity of care findings have been inconsistent.

Methods: Study participants are 178 Kaiser Permanente Northwest Members (93 women, 85 men) with serious mental illness (primarily schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, or bipolar disorder) in a longitudinal study of recovery. At baseline, participants completed two in-depth interviews detailing personal and mental health care history and current life circumstances, and a paper- and- pencil questionnaire that included measures of satisfaction with mental health care providers, quality of life, symptom levels, and recovery status. Questionnaire data are linked to health plan records of services used and identifiers for providers of those services. Results presented here are from Wave I qualitative data; quantitative data analyses are underway.

Results: Preliminary analyses of qualitative data indicate that continuity of care and having a good relationship with one's provider have important independent positive impacts on recovery. Consumers fortunate enough to experience both components appear to have the best outcomes. Mental health providers who collaborate with consumers to develop and test plans of care acceptable to both clinician and consumer, particularly regarding medications, are seen as more helpful and more competent. Clinicians who are kind, caring, understanding, supportive, and interested in their patients as "persons" facilitate development of strong and trusting relationships that increase consultation and requests for help during periods of increased symptoms.

Conclusions: Continuity of care, and positive relationships with mental health providers, facilitate recovery. Trusting relationships with providers may take significant time to develop, particularly when individuals have had bad experiences with care or have been treated involuntarily. Previous research examining continuity of care may not have followed people for periods long enough to observe these outcomes; lack of attention to the relationship between consumer and provider in the context of continuity of care may also have obscured findings.