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“Southeast Behavioral Health Group: Putting Humpty Dumpty Back Together Again”

By Nancy Harris King, Development Director

Southeast Mental Health Services, Partnership for Progress and Wellness Works are working hard to reintegrate mental health and substance abuse treatment into mainstream health care. Somewhere along the road in the development of modern medicine, Humpty Dumpty fell off the wall and his head got separated from his body.

For the last 100 years, mental health and substance abuse treatment have been considered a medical specialty, rather than a component of basic health care. Behavioral healthcare has been a separate system from physical healthcare, causing confusion, fragmentation and inefficiency.

Example: A person goes to his medical doctor complaining of fatigue and chronic pain. Not in the habit of screening for depression, the doctor prescribes a pain reliever. Some of the person’s physical discomfort lessens, but the underlying depression worsens. The depression is not detected until the individual reaches the level of a mental health crisis. At that point, the depression has taken a greater toll on the individual and his family.

Another result of the fragmentation is the fact that people living with severe mental illnesses die on average 20 years sooner than their same-age peers. Without the head attached to the body, it’s too easy to overlook serious physical illnesses that may be impacting a person’s health and wellbeing. All too often, the physical complaints of persons living with severe mental illness are dismissed as being “all in your head.”

At Southeast Behavioral Health Group, we believe that all the king’s men CAN put Humpty Dumpty back together again. We are working closely with our health care partners across the six counties to co-locate and integrate our mental health and substance abuse services in places where individuals access general health care. For several years, we have had working partnerships with Valley Wide Health Systems and High Plains Community Health Center to bring our services on-site where people can access them more easily. Our staff not only provides on-site services, but is also available to consult on cases where a mental health or substance abuse diagnosis may be in question. This type of early intervention and coordination is a key factor in minimizing the impact of a mental health or substance abuse problem, as well as bringing down the overall cost of health care.

Over the coming months, you will begin to see changes in how health care is delivered within the region. People who utilize the public health system will be asked to establish a “medical

home” where they will be encouraged to participate in prevention opportunities and chronic disease management. Medical providers will use technology to communicate critical patient health information with each other. Accountable Care Collaborative Teams will be required to track not just the services they provide, but the health outcomes of the people they treat. Medical providers will begin to do more screening for behavioral health problems and indicators of chronic disease, to reduce emergency room visits and intercept costly potential crises.

At Southeast Behavioral Health Group, we are committed to being your local partner in health care so that patients with multiple diagnoses will receive quality, affordable integrated health care services.

Optional graphic:

