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The Best of the Best

by Paula LEVY

Addictions staff secures best practice awards

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COUNTY - Addiction Services won two awards for its enhanced services for rural adolescents, women and smokers.

"The model that we created was greatly focused on improving access and reducing barriers," said community-based program manager Todd Leader. "In rural Nova Scotia, if you want to improve people's health, you have to bring things to where they are."

Addiction Services, which is a tri-district program of South Shore Health, Southwest Health and Annapolis Valley Health, was recognized for improving health in rural areas at the annual HealthAchieve conference organized by the Ontario Health Association (OHA) held last month in Toronto. It attracts up to 8,000 health care professionals from across North America.

For its programming Enhanced Services for Rural Adolescents, Women and Smokers: Improving Accessibility, Appropriateness and Impacts, Addiction Services brought home one of eight awards for International Best Practices. In addition, the program was also named the Best of the Best Practices.

The awards are judged on originality, relevance to hospitals and health care, use of evidence, objectivity, clarity and quality of presentation, practical implications and relevance to the theme. This year's theme for the conference was "Inspiring Ideas and Innovations."

Addiction Services was chosen among 200 submissions to participate in the HealthAchieve 2005 conference with nearly 60 other displays.

Mr. Leader said staff are overwhelmed by the honour since they went up against much larger organizations

with deeper pockets. But, he said, working on the enhancement over the past few years has enabled staff to raise its level of service.

"We thought our No. 1 priority in terms of improving services is about making it more readily available to people and create services that are more customized to the population," he said.

School-based prevention, early intervention and counselling services were developed and made available in every junior and senior high school in the area on a scheduled basis. In this district, there have been two adolescent community health workers hired to work in schools in Lunenburg and Queens counties full time in early intervention counselling.

Community health worker Scott Priske works in area senior and junior high schools. Increasing services in rural areas, such as the program now in schools, has secured Addiction Services two awards. Paula Levy photo

"Kids can just drop in," said Mr. Leader, noting the school-aged children in the junior and senior high school levels can refer themselves or are required to see the counsellor as a result of a behaviour.

"We wanted it to be really easy for kids to access us because kids can't get to places on their own," said Mr. Leader. "Our goal is simply to make that service far more accessible."

He said the students are not only able to access the service more easily, but they also find the service less intimidating because it is in a familiar location.

In programming for women, Addiction Services enhanced structured treatment, women's life enhancement and family series programming. There is a women's service co-ordinator in each of the three districts who has been working with other health professionals to offer public health fairs.

"That helped to raise the issues that they can receive help with," said Mr. Leader. "We recognize that there are women-specific issues in the addictions field. ... We're attempting to provide service that is really relevant to those issues."

Treatment for nicotine addiction included assessment, individual and group treatment and, where appropriate, the provision of nicotine replacement therapies to the client. In all respects, the focus of programming was to address barriers to accessibility and to provide programming that was more appropriate to the needs and life circumstances of targeted client populations.

"We have an actual program developed that's specific to nicotine addiction and we're bringing it out into the communities," said Mr. Leader, noting its nicotine addictions counsellors hold meetings in about 60 different locations in the three health districts.

"It takes away the barriers or excuses that keep people from trying it," said Mr. Leader about people being able to access the service in their own community.

The three services were monitored by staff since their implementations.

"As a result of our implementation of these initiatives, we saw incredible increases in the uptake of those services," said Mr. Leader.

It was determined that, in a one-year period, the number of adolescent clients increased by 94 per cent, the number of female clients by 53 per cent, the number of male "nicotine-only" clients by 1,574 per cent, and the number of female "nicotine-only" clients by 5,500 per cent. The total number of Addiction Services clients also increased by 37 per cent.

The awards will be formally presented to the three district health authority chief executive officers by the awards sponsors on December 19. The event will also provide an opportunity for Addiction Services staff and community stakeholders to celebrate the program's achievement.

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