

Mental Health Breakthrough

Members dispel fear over direct service billing goals in meeting with DMH director, pledge to work together



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SEIU 721 members held a historic meeting with Department of Mental Health Director Dr. Marvin Southard on February 18, 2009 about **direct service goals, the budget crisis, and the challenge of transformation.** The Mental Health Transformation Committee found common ground on the challenges and opportunities both members and management are facing in the coming year.

▲ No punishment on direct service billing:

Management definitively stated that it is not taking an individual or punitive approach to direct service. Anyone who experiences this should report any managers who are not on message in this regard to DMH leadership so they can make sure we have a single, consistent message.

▲ Commitment to avoid layoffs or negative impacts for employees:

DMH is facing ongoing budget challenges, including a \$51 million deficit, and DMH's goal is to avoid any layoffs or negative impacts for employees. The good news is that the recently enacted federal stimulus package will increase the federal match for mental health services, which is expected to bring in an additional \$36 million for DMH in the next year. *Since the meeting, we learned that the state budget includes \$227 million in cuts to mental health, subject to ratification by voters. More than 100 DMH members signed a petition to the legislature expressing our support for the funding.*

▲ Moving ahead on transformation: The budget challenges make the work of transformation even more important. DMH will be identifying which clinics, or parts of clinics, to transform into MHSA programs. DMH committed to working with the Union to build on the **recent success at Downtown Mental Health, where the transformation to a Wellness program occurred with no position cuts, changes in team assignments, duties, or criteria for clients entering the program. Existing groups are not affected and new groups may be added.** Prevention and Early Intervention will be the next phase of MHSA rollout, including goals of leading to fewer clients requiring care, and providing care for indigent clients not currently served by DMH. Again, Management committed to working with the Union on this process, including addressing issues such as **retraining and devising new treatment models.**



“Dr. Southard made it clear that no one should be punished around direct service billing. He really wants us to work together on this to make sure we’re fully funding our services. We’re at a turning point on direct service goals.”

— HALLIE CARTER, MEDICAL CASE WORKER
ANTELOPE VALLEY PSYCHIATRIC MOBILE RESPONSE TEAM

▲ Measuring Performance: In order to compete in the challenging funding environment for mental health services, DMH needs to demonstrate that it delivers quality client care with efficiency and effectiveness, and will be determining how best to measure its performance. The Union will need to work with Management to ensure that we are measuring and capturing our work in a way that supports quality client care, employee satisfaction and the goals of DMH.

With these major challenges and opportunities before us, we need more of our members to get involved. **If you are interested in being an advocate for your clients and your coworkers, speak to your Union Steward or contact Jane Jose at (213) 368-8671 or jane.jose@seiu721.org**

What is the Mental Health Transformation Committee?

It's DMH 721 members and management joining together to improve client care, solve worksite problems, and improve recording of direct services. Our Mental Health Transformation Committee meets monthly.



SEIU 721 and LA COUNTY DMH:

The Faces of Mental Health

