



Process Improvement in Los Angeles County Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment

In this month's issue, we are going to highlight some key findings from a process improvement project implemented in Los Angeles County. UCLA Integrated Substance Abuse Programs described some of the qualitative findings of the project in the article, "I've been NIATxed": Participants' Experience with Process Improvement" (under review).

What is Process Improvement or NIATx?

Process improvement is a series of actions taken to identify, analyze and improve existing processes within an organization to meet new goals and objectives. The Network for the Improvement of Addiction Treatment (NIATx) is one tool agencies can employ to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of services provided. There are four specific aims:

- Reduce waiting time between the first request for service and the first treatment session.
- Reduce the number of patients who do not keep an appointment.
- Increase the number of people admitted to treatment.
- Increase the period that patients stay engaged in treatment.

What did LACES do?

Staff from LACES, the Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC), and ISAP interviewed 33 individuals who represented all levels of the pilot project: 10 Executive Sponsors; 12 Change Leaders; and 11 Team members. Eleven out of the 13 change teams participated in this qualitative evaluation. The interviews consisted of semi-structured questions concerning the experiences of the individuals who participated in the pilot project. Although interview questions differed among treatment providers, all interviews included questions regarding the participant's role and responsibilities on the project, the use of data, initial reactions to the change process, and what they would change about the project. Treatment providers' recruitment was selected by using a convenience sampling approach. Providers were notified in 2008 that UCLA staff would be contacting them to participate in interviews as part of the qualitative evaluation of the process improvement project. The interviews and the analyses of the responses were completed in 2009 and the article based on the results is currently under review.

What did we find out?

Providers noted the utility of several factors including the value of the walk-through exercise, the evolution of the change team leader role, and the importance of communication. Providers also noted some challenges in implementing NIATx including struggles with collecting and submitting data, limited staff and a lack of any additional funds to implement some of the changes suggested change team. However, comments overall indicated a positive experience for staff, administrators, and clients. Providers noted the relative ease of implementation and how quickly changes resulted in impressive improvements. It was also noted that additional training on data collection and a reduction in the frequency of the project conference calls would be good changes to make if future process improvement projects are implemented. This process improvement study supports the use of NIATx as a tool to improve services to consumers of addiction treatment. Furthermore, process improvement may be implemented at a low cost with minimal training. For more information on NIATx and process improvement, check out the NIATx site at www.niatx.net.