

SOAR Dialogue Highlights 5/29/14

Attendees: Emily Carmody, Cecelia Colson, Liz Blass, Candice Chilton, Charlene Powell, Randy Glazier, Elizabeth McDermott, Pamalia Davis, Joyce Allen, Tracy Miller

Introductions and Updates

- Emily Carmody, NCCEH, Raleigh- Just had a SOAR Training in Raleigh and excited to see the impact the newly-trained caseworkers make.
- Cecelia Colson and Liz Blass, Pisgah Legal Services, Asheville- 2 approvals this month
- Candice Chilton, LATCH, Durham- Been very busy with cases
- Charlene Powell, ECBH MCO- 3 pending cases
- Randy Glazier, Women's Center of Wake County, Raleigh- 1 pending case
- Elizabeth McDermott, LATCH, Durham- Have had a few approvals, Candice received first approval on reconsideration case
- Pamalia Davis, Housing for New Hope, Durham- 1 approval this month for a total of 6 approvals in 2014
- Joyce Allen, Disability Advocates, Raleigh- Has 1 pending case
- Tracy Miller, Cumberland County, Fayetteville – 4 pending cases, represented first applicant at a hearing and was approved, found a lawyer to take referrals for SOAR cases

Substance Use and SOAR Applications

- SOAR caseworkers see a lot of substance use with applicants- past and present
- Basics:
 - The key question that DDS is trying to answer is: Is the substance use material to the disabling condition?
 - If the substance use is taken away and there is still be a disabling condition that prevents the applicant from working = substance use is not material to the disabling condition
 - If the substance use is taken away and there is not be a disabling condition that prevents the applicant from working = substance use is material to the disabling condition
 - If a condition was caused by substance use (i.e. liver damage, alcohol-induced dementia) and the condition meets a listing, the applicant can still be approved for benefits as long as their condition would not improve with sobriety
 - If you are working with someone who has been using substances, it is important to get them to a physical exam to see if there are undiagnosed conditions that need to be treated
 - These conditions may also meet a listing
- Substance use can be evaluated in a number of ways:
 - Look at periods of time when sober to see if a disability was there

- Still using but their treating physician/treatment team believes that it is not material
- SOAR can also be used as engagement tool
 - Useful if you are not able to determine if material
 - Discuss with the applicant if they are willing to go to treatment for documented clean time for a period of time to see how it impacts their disability
- There are certain pairings of substances and conditions that are difficult to determine
 - Depression and alcohol
 - Manic symptoms and amphetamines
- Important to have a conversation with treating doctor to see what their opinion is
 - SOAR caseworkers may have more access to other information from family and friends and their own observations than physicians
 - A signature may require a conversation with the SOAR caseworker, applicant and doctor
 - Important to explain to doctor about what DDS is asking and about what services (payees, etc.) that will be in place to support the applicant if awarded benefits
 - If you disagree with the physician, you can submit the Medical Summary Report as collateral information
 - Ask the applicant about going to treatment to show doctor what sobriety does for functioning
- Engaging individuals with substance use issues:
 - People can be in different stages of change so they go back and forth about going to treatment
 - Some individuals do not view their substance use as a problem
 - Tips:
 - Shoot straight- present the information clearly and be firm in conversation
 - Important to recognize that too much pressure may lead to increased use or to them disappearing
 - Shaming individuals may damage engagement and increase use
 - Use the team approach- engage their other case managers or treatment providers so that the team can support them in recovery which can be scary
 - Using 12 step sayings can help people recognize that you are familiar with recovery
 - Figure out what triggers their use-
 - Provides insight into level of substance use
 - Gets to the core of the problem- “Why are you getting high?”
 - May find that they are using to deal with symptoms that are already there (mental health and physical illnesses)
 - Shows that they had a disabling condition prior to their use
 - Motivational Interviewing can also help with engagement
 - Recommend all SOAR caseworkers take this training
 - Rather than arguing about treatment, see how SOAR and SSI/SSDI benefits align with their goals

- Donna, the SOAR DDS Examiner, has stated that helping her to see if they are self-medicating with substances provides a clearer view of the materiality of the substance use
- If sobriety isn't possible, what can you look for in medical records to see if the substance use is material:
 - See if medical records provide a timeline for what came first: symptoms or substance use
 - Discuss with friends/family to see if they know timeline
 - Forced clean time- inpatient hospitalization or prison time
 - Look at records for ER visits:
 - Always do blood panels with drug screen and blood alcohol level
 - See if there are ER visits when sober and what symptoms they are presenting with
- Emily is a resource for everyone who may need to discuss substance use and SOAR applications

Next SOAR Dialogue Call is June 19th at 10 AM.

We will be discussing getting doctor's signatures on Medical Summary Reports.

Register for the call by following this link: <http://www.ncceh.org/events/758/>