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GNMH still serving community

Greater Nashua Mental Health is Open - Just Not "As Usual"

Governor Sununu has mandated the closing of all non-essential businesses in an attempt to slow the spread of the virus during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hospitals are scrambling to treat sick patients and makeshift healthcare facilities are springing up in available facilities to accommodate the overwhelming need. With beds for physically sick patients at an absolute premium, Greater Nashua Mental Health (GNMH) is determined not to add even more strain to the fragile inpatient system by allowing individuals with mental health and substance use disorders deteriorate at this time of isolation and high anxiety.

"We are continuing to provide critically needed mental health and substance use disorder services, while also following all recommended procedures for the health and safety of clients and staff," stated Craig Amoth, President and CEO of GNMH. "We're remaining open for business; we're just doing it differently. Our staff have adapted remarkably well under the circumstances."

Fortunately, most services are now being provided by Telehealth, as sanctioned by the State of New Hampshire. Many clients enjoy this method of interaction and appreciate the ability to receive services safely from home, since many are anxious about

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*Dr. Cynthia Whitaker, Chief of Services at
Greater Nashua Mental Health.*

going out into public spaces, especially if they are considered particularly vulnerable. Interestingly, some clients are preferring this method over face-to-face sessions, especially our younger clients. This could change the way that many organizations do business in the future.

Telehealth visits can also be a bit more challenging for parents and families, however. Many parents are working from home and their children are with them full-time. Children are supposed to be homeschooled during this time which requires adult supervision. Parents may be ill themselves or may be taking care of someone who is ill. Balancing all this, in addition to finding a quiet, private space at home in which to conduct the phone appointment is not always easy, especially if there are very young children in the home. Some families on tight budgets may also have limited phone plans, so this creates a whole other challenge when conducting a one-hour Telehealth call in lieu of a physical office appointment. Fortunately, many of the insurance

plans have stepped up with assistance to their members by purchasing additional minutes or even providing a phone if necessary.

While Telehealth has been tremendously effective, not all treatment can be provided over a video session. Some patients still require face to face visits with their medical provider to receive vital care such as injectable medications, for example, so our facility must remain open for limited hours to those clients, while still practicing safe methods for both clients and staff. In addition, agency support and front desk staff must continue to field and process the increased volume of incoming and outgoing phone calls. We have also had to invest in enhanced broadband and other IT hardware to support our staff and clients to work remotely.

Community Support Services staff must also continue to provide some home or community visits to maintain the stability of certain clients with critical needs, while also practicing safe distancing and other recommended methods

to stay well. "We know that COVID-19 will be around for a while and we need to conserve our human resources, along with personal protective gear," added Dr. Marilou Patalinjug-Tyner, Chief Medical Officer at GNMH. "If our staff doesn't remain healthy, there won't be anyone to provide services, so we have to remain mindful of that."

There are many hurdles to jump right now and flexibility is key during this time of constant change and adaptation. Despite all of this, it is clear that community mental health staff all over the State have been doing amazing work during this entirely novel experience, as all 10 of them remain open to serve clients.

"We are extremely proud of our staff and how they have risen to this unique challenge," said Dr. Cynthia Whitaker, Chief of Services at Greater Nashua Mental Health. "They are compassionate, dedicated and heroic professionals pulling together to support not only their clients but also each other, as we all navigate this new territory. The fallout of the pandemic is likely going to be significant, but we fully intend to be here to assist our community to remain well."

For questions about our services, please call (603) 889-6147, or visit www.gnmh.org for agency updates and COVID-19 information and virtual resources.