

Message from the President

For the last three decades, the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities has developed very creative ways to draw down Federal Medicaid dollars which are used to fund the services we provide to our consumers. While this was very positive for our field, it resulted in New York State receiving far more Medicaid dollars than any other State. With the economic downturn that began in 2008, it has become increasingly clear that New York State cannot continue to expect such large sums from the Federal government. Several months ago, the Governor created a task force to look for ways to reduce the amount of money the State received from the Federal government, while at the same time ensuring that the quality of care we provide remains very high. OPWDD is in the process of securing approval from the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare which, if approved will radically change how our field is paid as well as how we provide and track services to our consumers. The project that OPWDD is working on is called the 1115 Waiver and is designed to be a multi-year demonstration project. As more information becomes available on this project, I will periodically provide you with important updates. If OPWDD receives approval to proceed with the 1115 Waiver the intended results are as follows:



- * Improved Care Coordination for the consumers.
- * Focus on person centered planning, individual responsibility, and self determination.
- * New reimbursement models designed to increase efficiency, improve accountability, and reduce costs.
- * Expand the range of community based services.
- * Redesign assessment tools which will establish how much money a consumer will receive for the services he/she needs.
- * The development of a comprehensive management system that is driven by performance metrics linked to personal outcomes and system performance.

Lifespire is presently working with several other large city-based organizations to develop a joint proposal for OPWDD that will hopefully be approved as a "pilot project" to demonstrate how these goals can be achieved.

Mark van Voorst
CEO and President

"The Netbooks will give Lifespire the opportunity to help focus on what services are being provided at specific locations and track the location of service delivery using a built in GPS system, in addition to easing the documentation process for our staff. In an era where compliance is of paramount importance, a system such as this will reduce the possibility of fraudulent activity to near zero level"

Continuously redefining how to best provide the most high quality services to consumers, Lifespire's Article 16 Clinic successfully implemented the use of digital signatures and scanning of records for easy retrieval in 2010. In addition to incorporating innovative ideas into their operations, Article 16 Clinic focuses on maintaining 100% transparency. With a team of experts reviewing the entire set of services the consumers receive to ensure the service is medically necessary to be continued, both quality and quantity is monitored to maintain compliance. All charts are reviewed by this team at the time of admission, once every three months and at the time of discharge.

Working to support individuals participate in the community and aspire for a high quality of life, Article 16 Clinic is one of Lifespire's most comprehensive services.

OPWDD Hiring Practice Changes

On April 1, 2011, OPWDD made several changes to their hiring practices for all state direct care applicants. To name a few, all new hires will have to:

- have at least high-school diploma or its equivalent
- have to undergo psychological and fitness testing
- will be subject to mandatory drug testing

Similarly, in an effort to promote a safe and productive workplace for all consumers and staff, Lifespire maintains a Drug Free Workplace. In order to do this, **Lifespire began conducting pre-employment drug testing for all prospective employees on October 17, 2011.** During Lifespire's orientation process, all prospective employees are screened for drug abuse by technician for COMPLY Corporation.

Lifespire identified the VP for Human Resources as a Designated Employer Representative (DER) who will be the only person to receive confidential information such as a drug test result.

All testing is conducted at Lifespire's Central Administration Office. Prospective employees are asked to refrain from voiding approximately 45-50 minutes before the scheduled test. Each person must furnish a photo ID (e.g. driver's license, passport, etc.) to the COMPLY technician processing the test documents and specimens.

All tests are conducted under the guidelines set forth by the US Department of Health and Human Services. The COMPLY technician sends overnight all specimens collected to a certified laboratory which performs five (5) panel screens for drugs. The panel analyzes specimens for the following drugs: Marijuana, Cocaine, Opiate Narcotics, Amphetamines and Phencyclidine.

A certified Medical Review Officer (MRO) will examine positive and negative test documents and lab reports for accuracy and proper protocol. The MRO staff will finalize presumption negative lab results and interview applicants who provided non-negative presumptive results to confirm or rule out legitimate explanation for the presence of illicit substance in their specimens. MRO staff will transmit encrypted confirmed results to your DER via secure e-mail address.

Results are reported to the DER promptly following the MRO (Medical Review Officer) finalization, normally within 24 to 72 hours from receipt of the specimen at the laboratory. Generally, negative specimens (indicating a "clean" or drug-free specimen) are reported the next day the lab receives the results of the specimen. The DER will only notify prospective employees of positive results and Lifespire will rescind the conditional offer of employment at that time.

To date, Lifespire has conducted fifty-one (51) drug tests. Out of 51 tests, four (4) were confirmed for the presence of illegal substances.

Firefighters Come Through Again!!!

For the 11th year in a row, firefighters from FDNY Squad 270 of Division 13 in Queens came to Lifespire's John A. Cook Day Comprehensive Services Center to celebrate Christmas with our individuals with disabilities, to pass out presents and good will.



Firefighters, dressed in Santa hats walked around the program with big smiles on their faces, handing presents to people who were so excited to see them that some of them couldn't help but wrap their arms around the firefighters. Many of the individuals had smiles on their faces that were larger than life.

Ivor Ramphal, Director of John A. Cook Center, recalled that "these brave individuals started coming to our program during a period when so many of them had lost their fellow workers and friends in the 911 tragedy." He also talked about the year when, in the middle of giving out gifts, the firefighters were called to put out a fire and came back later, covered with soot and smelling heavily of smoke, to continue giving out presents to the rest of the 141 people who come here for services.

When asked what motivates them to continue coming here to distribute gifts, Lieutenant David Harmann said that "it's worthwhile supporting our community and seeing the smiles on their faces."

We here at Lifespire's John A. CSC would like to express our gratitude to the following firefighters who came here on Friday, December 23, 2011 to make our world a better place to be in; Lieutenant David Harmann, Paul Moyik, Dan Pritzker, Travon Jones, Keith Mignone and John Hoffman.

Consumers of the Month



Rafael Figueroa and Dawn Marotto

Every year, Staten Island's Developmental Disabilities Council Office honors Staten Island Consumers for their achievements of the past year. This year, on December 16, 2011, two consumers from Lifespire were represented and attended a ceremony where they were presented with certificates.

Rafael Figueroa who lives at Lifespire's Racial Court residence and attends Staten Island CSC was recognized for how well he adjusted and acclimated himself into his new environment and neighborhood after he moved into Racial Court. He is described as a big help around the residence and gets along well with his housemates. Dawn Marotto who also attends Lifespire's Staten Island CSC and lives in a residence operated by another agency was recognized for her efforts and work on crocheting scarves for the participants of the 2012 Special Olympics.

We want to congratulate both Dawn and Rafael for their efforts and commitments to the communities in which they live, work and play.

Lifespire Group Brings Holiday Joy to Residents at the St. Albans VA



A group of developmentally disabled adults brought some holiday cheer to veterans living at the St. Albans VA home last Thursday by singing Christmas carols, rapping and dancing for them.

Psychotropic Medication

By Dr. Phil Hore

A recent article in the New York Times appeared to indicate there were significant problems with the misuse of psychotropic medications in our field. There was indeed a time when these medications were used primarily to control behavior and keep people compliant and quiet. However, Lifespire has come a long way from those days. Our approach to the use of psychotropic medications hinges on using them not primarily to control behavior but rather to treat the underlying mental illness or disorder that often lies behind some of the challenging behaviors that we see. With someone who is depressed, an antidepressant medication does not make them less responsive, it enables the individual to surface through the dark fog of depression and lift their spirits. When someone is out of touch with reality and hallucinating or being tormented by voices in their head, an antipsychotic medication can bring peace and make them less tortured. When someone is so anxious that every moment is filled with dread, an anti-anxiety medication can allow them to live again and find joy in life. When someone has impulse control difficulties and is just unable to control their challenging behavior, medication use can help boost their self-regulation. When a person is completely overwhelmed by all the sensory input coming at them and starting to fall apart, a medication may help buffer the experience and make it manageable.

As the article pointed out, these medications have possible serious side-effects and we must weigh the benefits and risks, as we do with all treatments. For this reason, every use of psychotropic medication requires informed consent for its use and every medication is reviewed and approved by the Human Rights Committee which meets monthly for this purpose. No staff person is permitted to administer a medication until both consent and approval have been obtained and no staff is ever allowed to decide to use medications as needed (PRN). Also staff is trained to report any changes in an individual's status and symptoms to the residence nurse. The prescribing psychiatrist is then notified. Lifespire generally uses psychiatrists who work for fellow agencies for the developmentally disabled and are committed, as we are, to using the lowest amount of medication for the desired effect.

Psychotropic medications are potent tools. Lifespire remains committed to using them responsibly to improve the quality of life of those we serve.

Lifespire's Article 16 Clinic Goes Electronic for 2012

Providing an array of services to over 1100 consumers, Article 16 Clinic is one of the most unique and progressive components of Lifespire, Inc. With 30 full time staff and 175 contract clinicians, the Clinic provides services ranging from individual and group psychotherapy, psychosocial and psychological evaluations to Speech, Occupational, Physical and Nutritional therapy at a variety of locations throughout New York. In addition to providing an array of comprehensive services in over 175 locations, Article 16 will be going electronic at the start of 2012.

"Article 16 Clinic will be providing our clinicians with Netbooks and going completely electronic," said Leslie Verghese, VP for Quality & Risk Management at Lifespire, Inc. who also serves as the Director of the Clinic.



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