

Developing a Volunteer Program to Support Addiction Treatment Services at the Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System

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Veterans Health Administration
VA Palo Alto Health Care System



Stanford
MEDICINE

Background

- Military veterans are at an increased risk for substance use disorders (SUD)
- The Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Healthcare System (VAPAHCS) offers multiple treatment programs for SUD
- To support continuity of care for veterans within VA Palo Alto Addiction Treatment Services (ATS), we launched the "**Mental Health/Addictions Volunteer + Innovations Clinic**"

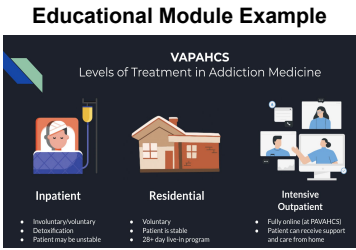
Methods/Approach

- **Summer 2022:** Program development starts
- **September 2022:** Recruited volunteers through established email lists and academic department channels.
- Identified needs within the VAPAHCS Addiction Treatment Services which volunteers could address, such as developing an online database of local SUD treatment resources, assisting veterans with telehealth access and technology, and conveying harm reduction materials to Veterans.
- Created educational material for volunteers centered on: (1) Principles of Addiction Medicine, (2) Multimodal addiction treatment, and (3) Care of Veterans.

Outcomes

Spring–Summer 2022

- Program leadership assembled; program development
 - ATS needs assessment
- Fall 2022**



- Volunteer recruitment, selection, and onboarding
- Winter 2023**

- Volunteer shifts began
- Preliminary feedback received; future directions targeted



Results

- 15+ volunteers accepted from ~25 applicants
- Accepted volunteers received preliminary training on addiction medicine, VAPAHCS, and VA ATS responses
- Volunteers began work in January 2023
- Volunteers have completed 8+ hours of work/month
- Preliminary feedback indicates volunteers' desire for direct engagement with clinicians and veterans and for internal leadership and advancement opportunities
- Persistent logistical challenges of onboarding students to the VAPAHCS volunteer system

Conclusions

- Efficient care for veterans with SUD is essential
- This novel volunteer program equips clinicians and patients with resources to access and navigate treatment
- **Next steps:** Continue recruiting volunteers and expanding resource to support holistic health and fulfilling volunteer experiences

Recommendations

Next steps for program development:

- **Create pathways** for student volunteers to serve in leadership roles
- **Increase volunteer opportunities** for direct involvement with veterans, clinicians, and other VAPAHCS staff.
- **Design workflows** to streamline volunteer onboarding and scheduling processes
- **Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion** in volunteer recruitment to better serve veterans

Acknowledgements

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