



Contact: Pam McKeown
ODMHSAS Public Information
(405) 522-5102

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**TULSA AGENCY NOW OFFERING TREATMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH
CO-OCCURRING SUBSTANCE ABUSE, MENTAL ILLNESS**

Approximately 10 million people nationwide - including 53 percent of drug abusers and 36 percent of alcohol abusers - are said to suffer from combinations of mental health and substance abuse disorders, meaning that effective treatment of both conditions can present a challenge. Typically, treatment facilities address only one issue – either mental illness or substance abuse – leaving a gap in services to those who could benefit from treatment for their “co-occurring disorder.”

To address this issue, the Associated Centers for Therapy, 7010 S. Yale, Suite 215, in Tulsa, is now offering intensive outpatient treatment services for co-occurring disorders. Opened only recently, the program already has identified more than 50 people who qualify for services, said Didi Herron, co-occurring disorders program director at ACT.

Rand Baker, deputy commissioner for mental health services at the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, said the new program will add a valuable service to mental health services in eastern Oklahoma.

“As one of our agency’s major contractors, ACT has done an outstanding job serving children with mental health needs through its ‘Systems of Care’ wraparound program, and demonstrated a commitment to quality services,” Baker said. “They have an incredible track record of service, and we are excited to be working with them on this new program.”

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Baker said the treatment needs of people with both a psychiatric disorder and a substance abuse disorder differ greatly from the needs of people with either a stand-alone substance abuse or psychiatric disorder.

“Treating people with co-occurring disorders is complex because of medication management concerns, and the interaction between substance abuse and psychiatric symptoms,” he said. “In the past, Oklahoma mental health providers haven’t been able to offer true, co-occurring treatment services to any great extent. Tulsa, however, is truly becoming a leader in this area, with last fall’s opening of the Tulsa Center for Behavioral Health’s residential unit for people with co-occurring disorders – an ODMHSAS facility – and now the ACT program.”

At TCBH, patients stay at the facility anywhere from three weeks to three months, depending on individual needs, Baker said. After completing TCBH’s program, they will be eligible for intensive outpatient services at ACT. A new evidence-based program model recently released by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration will provide the foundation for this new service.

Due to the complexity of treating co-occurring disorders, the average length of outpatient treatment at ACT will be approximately two years, Herron said.

“When a person has a mental illness, it doesn’t just go away,” she said. “One of the biggest problems is that people taking medication for mental illness go off the medicine because the side effects are so severe. Then, they may turn to drugs or alcohol to stop the symptoms of their illness. It becomes a vicious cycle.

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“To combat this cycle, our program will provide ‘wraparound’ services that include medication monitoring, case management, individual counseling and group counseling,” she said.

The program also will offer support.

“ACT has a number of programs and facilities, such as Action House, that offer social outlets for our clients,” she said. “They won’t need to go through the recovery process in isolation.”

Herron said she hopes the program will result in fewer people experiencing crisis situations or needing hospitalization because of psychiatric emergencies. Homelessness, also, hopefully will decrease.

“This program will help stabilize people and give them an outlet for a more stable life,” she said.

For more information about the program, call 918-492-2554, ext. 527.

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