

ABHW pledges support for Million Hearts Campaign

by Coral Ellis

The Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness (ABHW) and its member companies pledged support in May 2012 for the Million Hearts Campaign, organized to prevent one million heart attacks and strokes over five years. The campaign is a national initiative launched by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in September 2011.

This national initiative brings together individuals, federal agencies, state, county and local health officials, health care providers, pharmacies and pharmacists communities and patient organizations. ABHW joins other partners from across public and private health sectors, including the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid (CMS), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

ABHW distributed a newsletter article about the campaign to our members in order to help educate the consumers they serve, the providers in their networks and their own staff. In addition, ABHW is providing awareness about the campaign to a ABHW member's biometric screening notification process. Biometric screenings are short health exams that can identify any sign of cardiovascular problem or certain other medical conditions.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S. for adults of all races. Following a heart attack, approximately one in four women and one in five men will die within the first year. It is especially important for ABHW and other organizations interested in behavioral health to support this initiative because people with heart disease are more likely to suffer from depression than otherwise healthy people.

The burden from heart disease and stroke significantly impacts the behavioral health community. Persons with serious mental illness (SMI) die younger, on average 25 years earlier, than the general population. The increased morbidity and mortality are caused by risk factors such as smoking, obesity, substance abuse, and inadequate access to medical care. Data has also shown that psychological distress, which includes anxiety, depression, sleeping problems and loss of confidence, is associated with a higher risk of death from stroke. People who suffer from psychological distress have a 66 percent greater risk of death from cerebrovascular disease and a 59 percent greater risk of death from ischemic heart disease compared with people with no symptoms of mental distress.

Over the past few years, evidence has mounted

that depression should be added to the list of risk factors for cardiovascular disease. According to SAMHSA, in 2009, 45.1 million adults (19.9 percent) in the U.S. had a mental illness. Adults with SMI are more likely than adults without SMI to have high blood pressure and experience strokes. In a SAMHSA national survey in 2008 and 2009, 21.9 percent of adults who experienced any mental illness in the past year had hypertension, compared to 18.3 percent of adults without any mental illness who had hypertension in the past year. That same survey found that adults with any mental illness had a 5.9 percent chance of heart disease and 2.3 percent chance of stroke, compared to adults without mental illness who had a 4.2 percent chance of heart disease and only a 0.9 percent chance of stroke. Additionally, up to 83 percent of people with SMI are overweight or obese, another risk factor to heart attacks and stroke.

The data clearly indicate why it is essential for the behavioral health community to pay attention to the risk factors associated with heart attacks and strokes. One way behavioral health providers can do this is to recognize the importance of the "ABCS" — Aspirin for people at risk, Blood pressure control, Cholesterol management, and Smoking cessation— in their patients. They can also encourage physicians or other health care providers to promote a team-based approach to health care services in order to improve the quality of care in patients. Providers can help improve a person's health and possibly decrease their visits to the doctor by encouraging, where appropriate, participation in smoking cessation programs and nutrition efforts aimed to reduce sodium and eliminate trans-fats in the diet.

By signing the Million Hearts pledge, ABHW is helping to raise awareness about the close connection between mental illness and heart disease and work to help prevent heart attacks and strokes. We hope that other organizations will also sign the pledge and be part of the campaign to prevent one million heart attacks and strokes over the next five years. ABHW continues to look for more ways to be involved in the Million Hearts campaign and new partnership opportunities.

To learn more about the campaign and sign the pledge go to: <http://millionhearts.hhs.gov/index.html>.

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