

Partnering with VA Operational Leaders to Transfer an Implementation Strategy

Mental Health QUERI

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Implementation Strategies

Implementation Science typically focuses on research to improve the uptake of evidence-based *clinical practices and programs*, and ultimately the quality of care for Veterans. However, it can be just as important –and have a potentially greater impact – to facilitate the transfer of evidence-based *implementation strategies* to operational partners in order to enhance their ability to implement evidence-based practices in front-line clinical settings. The Mental Health Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (MH-QUERI) and the VA Office of Mental Health Operations (OMHO) formed a partnership specifically to accomplish that goal. OMHO enlisted MH-QUERI implementation experts to train and mentor central operations personnel in the use of an evidence-based implementation facilitation strategy that was tested in a QUERI study. To initiate this process, MH-QUERI investigators developed an Implementation Facilitation Training Manual (see below) and, in partnership with OMHO, a one-and-a-half-day training program.

Transferring an Evidence-Based Implementation Strategy

As the organizational entity charged with implementing clinical standards for VA mental health settings detailed in the *Uniform Mental Health Services Handbook*, the Office of Mental Health Operations (OMHO) needed to build national capacity for facilitating implementation of the *Handbook* standards by training their technical assistance staff. Office of Mental Health Operations' goals include ensuring quality of and access to mental health services, decreasing variability in mental health service delivery, developing and implementing operational practices in collaboration with VISNs and facilities, and managing national mental health operational programs.

Within the context of VA's Primary

Care–Mental Health Integration Initiative, MH-QUERI investigators developed, piloted, and tested the effectiveness of the implementation facilitation strategy in collaboration with regional and facility-level operational managers. The strategy uses both an external and internal facilitator. The *external facilitator* is an expert in implementation science, relevant clinical care models (e.g., collaborative care) and their evidence base, as well as general facilitation strategies. The *internal facilitator* is someone within the clinical organization who is familiar with facility-level organizational structures, procedures, and culture, as well as VA clinical processes and policies. The external facilitator mentors and trains the internal facilitator, so that the internal facilitator can become an expert in the use of multiple evidence-based implementation strategies.

Similarly, MH-QUERI implementation experts are training and mentoring central operations personnel as external facilitators so that they can assist clinical personnel across VA in implementing practices specified in the *VA Uniform Mental Health Services Handbook*. MH-QUERI investigators are collaborating with OMHO, Mental Health Services, and the Primary Care-Mental Health Integration (PC-MHI) program offices to develop a process for training and mentoring PC-MHI program and OMHO staff, as well as field-based subject matter experts, in the implementation facilitation strategy, enabling them to provide assistance to sites that require intensive facilitation to implement PC-MHI. Ongoing mentoring includes site visits to clinic front-lines and weekly calls.

Other facilitators have been trained to address additional specific implementation needs, including individuals working in the Serious Mental Illness Re-engagement Program, and the implementation of evidence-based psychotherapies. OMHO is now expanding the number of external facilitators in each of these programs. Perhaps most significant is that this combination of training and ongoing mentoring is being used as a means of transferring implementation knowledge to additional clinical and operational partners, and applying it with new facilitators.

Implementation Facilitation Training Manual

The Implementation Facilitation Training Manual: Using External

Continued

and *Internal Facilitation to Improve Care in the Veterans Health Administration* describes this facilitation strategy for implementing new programs or practices and details internal and external facilitators' activities and specific roles during all phases of implementation. Findings from the QUERI-funded evaluation indicate that this strategy supports successful implementation of complex programs and practices at sites that are unable to do so without assistance. The manual shows how facilitation addresses organizational barriers related to evidence and organizational culture and context, and includes recommendations for how facilitators can help sites design and adapt programs to meet local needs, such as how to include key stakeholders in implementation processes and how to keep them engaged in implementation

How Do I Learn More?

Implementation Facilitation Training Manual: Using External and Internal Facilitation to Improve Care in the Veterans Health Administration is available at www.queri.research.va.gov/tools/implementation/Facilitation-Manual.pdf

For more information about MH-QUERI's partnership with OMHO or Implementation Facilitation, visit our website

www.queri.research.va.gov/mh/default.cfm

and/or contact:

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and program sustainment. The manual also gives recommendations for facilitators to monitor program data, provide feedback to key stakeholders, and use measurement data to continue to adapt and improve programs. In addition, the manual includes facilitation tools that have proven useful in earlier implementation efforts.

The development of the external/internal implementation facilitation strategy and the training manual were informed by research, theory, and stakeholders at all levels of VA healthcare. The manual will continue to evolve as external and internal facilitators, partners, and key stakeholders provide ongoing input to implementation processes.

The Mental Health-QUERI Executive Committee

Each QUERI Center is led by a research expert and a clinician. The research expert and Director for MH-QUERI is **JoAnn Kirchner, M.D.** and the Clinical Coordinator is **Kathy Henderson, M.D.** The Implementation Research Coordinators are **Jeff Smith** and **Mona Ritchie, Ph.D. candidates**, and **Monica Matthieu, Ph.D.** The Executive Committee includes other experts in the field of mental health: Thomas Berger, Ph.D.; Robert Bossarte, Ph.D.; David Chambers, D.Phil.; Kenneth Conner, Psy.D., M.P.H.; Geoffrey Curran, Ph.D.; Nicole Hart, B.A.; Maga Jackson-Triche, M.D., M.S.H.S.; Daniel Kivlahan, Ph.D.; Dean Krahn, M.D.; Kathleen Lysell, Psy.D.; Stephen Marder, M.D.; Susan McCutcheon, R.N., Ed.D.; Skye McDougall, Ph.D.; Richard Owen, M.D.; Craig Rosen, Ph.D.; Lisa Rubenstein, M.D., M.S.P.H.; Annapurni Teague, M.D.; Wendy Tenhula, Ph.D.; John Williams, Jr, M.D., M.H.S.; Laura Wray, Ph.D.; and Alexander Young, M.D., M.S.H.S.