



As the past clearly demonstrates, corrections professionals have risen to face many challenges. The budget situation will be no different.

Sharing Knowledge Is Key to Managing Shrinking Budgets

Joan M. Shoemaker

Director of Clinical Services
Colorado Department of Corrections

The economic landscape across the nation is placing demands on the criminal justice system and calling for the implementation of cost-saving measures. Challenges are many as we struggle through this economic downturn. We must look critically at all of the services and practices currently utilized to ensure we have maximized potential at every opportunity.

Delivery of health care is expensive in all venues and corrections is no exception. Our system will be graded on how well we remain within the boundaries of legally acceptable care that is cost-effective while honoring the ethical values that our health care providers ascribe to. Maintaining the balance between all of the needs has been an ongoing challenge but will be even more important now as we continue to implement budget reductions.

Managed care models have assisted correctional systems in cost control. Use of drug formularies, utilization review committees and negotiated contracts for community health care services are examples of cost controlling measures that will become increasingly important. There are many examples nationwide of systems that are effectively using these tools, and such systems must be willing to assist others who may not have implemented an effective model. How can state

corrections assist jails in managing costs? Sharing information including drug formularies may be one example that has benefits for systems as well as offenders. If the same drugs are utilized for an offender in jail prior to incarceration in prison and then as the offender is released, continuity of care would be enhanced.

Correctional health care must integrate not only caring for the whole person but balance the needs of health care within the secure environment of the institution.

Correctional health care must integrate not only caring for the whole person but balance the needs of health care within the secure environment of the institution. In an atmosphere where public protection is essential, health care staff must creatively deliver needed care while understanding the restriction placed on their practice. Strong policies and procedures that

guide both the security staff and health care staff are needed to achieve interdependence.

Health care staff must be willing to share appropriate information regarding offenders. Often we use confidentiality of health information like a shield; however, there are many times where sharing information is critical to managing a situation. For example, in order to control outbreaks of MRSA or the H1N1 influenza everyone must work closely together to prevent the rapid spread of the infection. If security staff do not have enough information they will not be able to assist in managing the spread of infection.

Security staff are wonderful sources of information regarding how our patients are responding to treatment modalities. They see the offenders more frequently, for longer periods of time and can provide insight into issues and concerns. Developing the information network requires trust between the security and health care staffs. Creating opportunities for positive communications will enhance the network. Telephone triage between the clinic and housing unit staff may be invaluable in establishing cooperation between the areas. Demanding offenders may be deescalated by talking with health care staff, which makes the work easier for housing unit staff.

Increased communication between security and health care staff will assist in managing complicated offenders and lead to more successful of treatment outcomes. Establishing a comprehensive treatment plan that involves security, the entire health care treatment team and the offender will result in a more consistent approach to the offender's issues and behavior. Reduction of manipulative behavior from the offender will make it easier for everyone while potentially increasing compliance with medications or other treatments.

Comprehensive care has rewards beyond just the patient benefits and potential cost management. Job satisfaction for health care staff is enhanced. The feeling of making a difference for the patients is one of the strong values most health care staff have. The ethical responsibility to care for the chosen patient population is strong and influences how health care staff practice. Creating opportunities to practice within a multidisciplinary team honors the values of health care staff while maintaining the balance between health care needs and the secure environment.

As the past clearly demonstrates, corrections professionals have risen to face many challenges. The budget situation will be no different. Often, times like these bring creative solutions that assist in continuing the professional practices we demand of ourselves and believe in. ♦