

NEW DEVELOPMENTS AT FOUR COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH (June 26, 2016 - Independence Daily Reporter)

Four County Mental Health Center, Inc. has been the provider of public mental health services for Montgomery, Wilson, Elk, and Chautauqua Counties since 1964. In July 2014 Four County MHC also became the designated community mental health center for Cowley County and operates a branch office at Strother Field, the industrial park between Arkansas City and Winfield. Historically, being the designated community mental health center meant that citizens of each county had access to two services: outpatient counseling and psychiatric/ medication services. Over the past several years our scope of work has increased to include over 40 service programs designed to meet the unique needs associated with all ages and emotional/behavioral health challenges.

At both the federal and state level there are dramatic changes occurring in the focus of what good healthcare delivery systems need to be. It is becoming increasingly recognized that comprehensive mental health services play a significant role in reducing overall physical health care costs. While it has always been our mission to serve citizens in their home communities and provide whatever levels of care can assist even the most severely afflicted from requiring institutionalization, community mental health centers are being looked to as providers of choice for fully integrated care. Our clinicians and case managers are co-locating within primary care clinics so mental health assessments and associated support services can be immediately provided within the family physician's office and "whole-person" care can occur. Additionally, we have partnered to bring primary care services within our own building in Independence. Patients can get full medical assessment and treatment for mental health, physical health, and/or both all during the same visit. The addition of an on-site pharmacy has proven to be an added convenience that enhances patient treatment compliance.

In a continued effort to care for individuals in their home community, the State of Kansas has approached Four County MHC with a grant-supported initiative state officials believe will serve the entire southeast Kansas region and greatly reduce community costs associated with: 1) state hospital admissions (Osawatomie & Larned); 2) local emergency room visits; and 3) local law enforcement departments and jails. Four County MHC has been asked to open a Regional Crisis Stabilization Unit to address acute psychiatric episodes and provide detox services to those impaired by alcohol and/or drugs. While program models are still being evaluated, Four County MHC is in discussion with the City of Independence about the possibility of leasing approximately 6000 square feet of Building D, directly across the hall from the future advanced urgent care clinic to be operated by St. John's Health System. If this latest venture fully develops the two treatment facilities could greatly assist one another in managing patient needs, no matter their nature. For the psychiatric patient, treatment would be initiated on a supervised unit with the intention of stabilizing their condition so no formal hospitalization would be necessary. Additionally, the availability of social and medical detoxification for the substance abusing patient has shown reductions in emergency room visits, which is tied to the ever increasing costs of everyone's healthcare in those settings.

There is no doubt the landscape of healthcare is changing rapidly across the entire nation and it appears clear that behavioral health is going to be a growing part of whole-person or complete-person treatment planning by all healthcare providers.