

Collaboration: Essential to Creating a Seamless System of Care for High-Risk Populations

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Abstract

In the complex landscape of social services, organizations often find themselves operating within isolated silos. Nonprofits, government agencies, health systems, and other entities face various obstacles, such as funding restrictions, organizational traditions, lack of trust, and competition, which contribute to the fragmentation of services. Consequently, individuals and families in need of multiple services often encounter a disjointed system of care.

For organizations genuinely committed to their mission and the well-being of their clients, multidisciplinary collaboration is not just beneficial but essential. By streamlining access to services, the focus can shift from bureaucracy to healing and progress. It's incumbent upon organizational partners to recognize that no single entity can fulfill all needs and to establish collaborative relationships that construct a cohesive care system centered around the client.

Introduction

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For organizations genuinely committed to their mission and the well-being of their clients, multidisciplinary collaboration is not just beneficial but essential. By streamlining access to services, the focus can shift from bureaucracy to healing and progress. It's incumbent upon organizational partners to recognize that no single entity can fulfill all needs and to establish collaborative relationships that construct a cohesive care system that is client-centered. Shared financial resources can result from multi-disciplinary collaborations. When an organization identifies a need for the population that they serve that is outside of their expertise, collaborating with an organization that does provide the service to bring the service onsite can be highly effective. For example, if a drug treatment program for women with children recognizes that onsite childcare is a necessity for women to be able to successfully complete their treatment, they can connect with a local provider with the expertise to bring their services onsite. This

approach not only addresses the specific needs of the clients but also optimizes resources by leveraging external expertise and funding.

At NOVA, a comprehensive victim services organization, we provide support to victims of sexual abuse/assault and other serious crimes, such as human trafficking, fraud, cybercrime, and homicide. These victims often face a complex journey to recovery, compounded by trauma, housing instability, financial insecurity, and navigating unfamiliar systems of support. NOVA has developed a continuum of high-quality, victim-centered services through strategic collaborations built on memorandums of understanding (MOUs), contracts, and interpersonal relationships. Our approach involves partnering with diverse entities, sharing resources, and securing multiple funding sources.

Victims access NOVA's services through various channels, including self-referral, third-party referrals, and our 24/7 helpline. Programs like the Forensic Nurse Program and the Children's Advocacy Center require collaboration with non-traditional partners. For example, our Forensic Nurse Program operates through contracts with hospitals in Bucks County and fostering relationships with emergency department staff. When a victim presents at a hospital emergency department and is medically cleared, hospital staff request that a NOVA Forensic Nurse respond to the hospital to collect evidence and collaborate with the emergency department team to ensure optimal healthcare. Simultaneously, a trained NOVA Advocate provides accompaniment to support the victim through the process, providing information on services like counseling and advocacy.

The Bucks County Children's Advocacy Center, a program of NOVA, exemplifies multidisciplinary collaboration by bringing together professionals from various disciplines to provide a safe space for children to share their experiences. This multi-disciplinary team collaborates on decisions regarding services and prosecution, ensuring a victim-centered approach.

These programs facilitate a seamless transition from investigation to victim services, offering continuity and support during a tumultuous time.

We also engage in advocacy and participate in external committees addressing community needs. For example, NOVA staff contribute to committees addressing issues like housing insecurity, ensuring our services align with broader community initiatives. These engagements provide opportunities to share expertise, build relationships, and foster collaboration across disciplines.

Formal agreements like MOUs and contracts clarify responsibilities, but personal relationships remain essential for effective collaboration. Building these relationships requires openness, understanding, and a commitment to prioritizing client needs over organizational egos.

Multidisciplinary collaboration not only improves service delivery but also enhances efficiency. For instance, the NOVA Forensic Nurse Program employs a community-based central forensic nurse service to meet Pennsylvania's requirement for certified forensic nurses available 24/7 in hospitals with emergency departments. This cost-effective approach ensures availability despite the shortage of forensic nurses and reduces the financial burden on individual hospitals. In essence, the success of nonprofit organizations in providing comprehensive, client-centered care hinges on their ability to break down silos and foster multidisciplinary collaboration. By pooling resources, expertise, and services, organizations can offer clients a seamless continuum of support, from the immediate aftermath through long-term recovery.

While building and nurturing these collaborative relationships may pose challenges, the goal remains clear: to prioritize the needs and well-being of those served. Through mutual respect, open communication, and a steadfast commitment to remaining client-centered, the complexities of the social service landscape can be navigated with compassion and efficiency. As organizations like NOVA continue to advocate for the needs of the populations they serve, the importance of collective efforts becomes evident. By forging strong partnerships across sectors and disciplines, communities can be created where every individual receives the care, support, and justice they deserve.