

Gateway Rehab: Specialized Treatment for Mental Illness and Substance Abuse

By Nancy Kennedy

Since 1972, Gateway Rehab has been a beacon of hope and renewal for persons who are struggling with addiction recovery. Gateway's growth, expansion and widespread reputation for excellence are due in no small part to the organization's exceptional vision and responsiveness

to new and emerging needs of the community. This commitment has been evident recently in the development of a new residential in-patient service that provides specialized treatment to persons who have both mental illness and substance use disorders.

"Gateway opened the Co-Occurring Unit about six months ago," says Vincent Argento, MA, MFT, Clinical Manager of the program. "It's a 12-bed unit for men and women, within our main facility in Aliquippa. Ten or fifteen years ago, addiction and mental illness were treated separately. Now we treat both in an integrated model of care. Gateway's administrators recognized that a significantly high number of people have co-occurring diagnoses and they identified the need to target this population. As a result, we are treating people who may have been turned away in the past."

Co-occurring disorders, the combination of mental illness and substance use disorder, is not uncommon. An example of a co-occurring diagnosis might be depression plus alcoholism. Many individuals with untreated mental illness use drugs and alcohol to self-medicate symptoms such as anxiety, panic and depression; this can lead to addiction. Alcohol and drug use can worsen mental illness symptoms and may change the brain in ways that make mental illness and behavioral change more likely. "It's not a question of which came first," Argento explains. "One does not cause the other. The conditions have similar risk factors, such as a history of trauma or certain environmental factors. What matters most is that both conditions are treatable and recovery is possible."

Gateway's Co-Occurring Unit provides enhanced mental health and addiction treatment which is diagnosis-based and highly indi-



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vidualized. A full time psychiatrist sees every new patient within 24 hours, and an interdisciplinary team of therapists, behavioral health technicians, intake counselors and nurses implement treatment that includes detox, individual behavioral therapy, group therapy, medication, and a supportive community. A special unit is necessary, Argento explains, because co-occurring disorders are increasingly common and their treatment demands a special dedicated, integrated approach.

Since the opening of the new unit in June 2023, 95 patients have been admitted. The average length of stay is 25.2 days, according to Tracy Plevel, vice-president, Development and Community Relations. "We have a successful discharge rate based on 21 or more days of treatment. Readmission, within 60 days of discharge, is just 6%." Argento adds, "Patient engagement is the most significant factor. The more engaged the patient is, the better the outcome. We can see the efficacy of the program in 25 days. The community is learning about the program; we are getting a high number of referrals and some patients are admitted directly from the ER. We want individuals, families and professionals to know about this program."

Argento has a background in mental health care with years of experience. "When I heard about the Co-occurring Unit, I knew I wanted to be part of it," he says. "I'm appreciative of the strong support for the program that the staff and I have received from Gateway's administration and board of directors. I credit the staff for our successful inaugural year. The staff is nothing short of amazing. They are a well-oiled machine, highly skilled and dedicated to helping others achieve and sustain recovery. We want the public to know that we are here, there is help available, and recovery is possible."

➤ To contact Vince Argento about **Gateway Rehab's Co-Occurring program**, call (412) 604-8900 ext. 1286 or email vince.argento@gatewayrehab.org. For more information about Gateway Rehab, visit www.gatewayrehab.org.



On July 1, 2022, Gateway Rehab acquired Greenbriar Treatment Center.



Combining efforts creates an even stronger focus on the patients and families that need our help on their road to recovery

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Greenbriar
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