

ACTION Campaign Promising Practices



Improving Client Engagement

*Counselor Feedback
Action Guide*

ACTION CAMPAIGN
Making an Impact on Addiction Treatment and Recovery

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Counselor Feedback

Purpose: to help your agency use counselor performance feedback as a way to increase client engagement and retention.

Information: We expect counselors to develop rapport with clients and engage them in a process of change. However, few agencies measure and provide feedback on each counselor's client retention rate. Using data on retention as a supervision tool has helped a number of agencies increase client engagement and retention.

Plan: First, do you have data systems in place that can identify which clients are assigned to which counselors? Can the system record client attendance and no-shows? Some useful measures include:

- Show rates for first and second counseling appointments
- Engagement rates (sometimes measured in percent of people that attended at least four sessions)
- Completion rates

Each of these data points measures something slightly different and each can be a useful supervision tool. If you do not have the data system in place, you may want to use the attached data collection tools and decide who will collect the data for each counselor.

Second, identify high-performing staff who will not be intimidated by an additional level of scrutiny to pilot this change. Discuss the pilot with the identified staff and develop a change plan that will make discussion of retention rates a regular part of supervision meetings.

Do: Implement the pilot for three or four weeks. Collect retention data and share it with the selected staff. It may be useful to share both the organization average as well as the clinician's own retention rates. Use the supervision process as a way to discuss the engagement process and ways to improve upon it.

Study: Review data collected (no show rates, four-week continuation rates, and completion rates). Note that completion rates measure may be difficult to change in the short term. Assess whether there has been a change in retention rates and discuss the outcome with staff.

- Does the pilot need more time to show a change?
- Is there a different way of measuring success that might be more appropriate?
Is there some way to modify the pilot to improve upon it?
- If the pilot is successful, move to full implementation with all staff.



Act: If the outcome of your pilot demonstrated a successful change, then implement fully or expand the pilot. Submit data to the ACTION Campaign Web site.



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Measuring the Impact of Change

The length of time necessary to test a change will vary depending on an agency's size. Scientifically, the preferred sample size is at least 40 clients. However, since you are testing a hypothesis, what you need are just enough clients before and after the change to see a trend. Pilots should not last more than a month, or they tend to lose their pilot status. We recommend that you run your change project pilot long enough to have at least 20 clients experience your new way of operating. For smaller agencies, depending on the change, this may take a month. Larger agencies probably should run a change for at least a week, even if that gives a sample larger than 40.

Practice Measure: the practice measure for this promising practice is two-fold and requires that the agency make the measures below transparent to all staff.



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Action Campaign Metrics Evaluation Tool

Agency Name _____

Level of Care _____

Action Promising Practice _____

Tool for Tracking Kept Assessment Appointments by Week

Instructions:

A: Enter Counselor names

B: Enter the week you are measuring retention rates

C: Decide on the measure that will be the focus of the counselor feedback. Examples might include:

1. Total number of clients scheduled vs. clients seen. This measure could be for
 - a. Assessments
 - b. Individual Counseling Sessions
 - c. Clients for all individual and group sessions
2. Total Scheduled Direct service hours vs. Actual Direct Service Hours
3. Percent Treatment completion

D: For item C1, enter number of clients scheduled to be seen either for assessment or individual session and if it is all clients (individual and group), please include total number of clients scheduled in each group that the counselor is facilitating into Column C

If the measure is direct service hours, you might record the expected direct services hours (e.g., 25 per week) into Column C

If the measure is percent treatment completion, you would record the number of unique clients per counselor into Column C

E: For item C1, enter the total number of clients seen for an assessment or in individual session and if it is all clients (individual and group), please include the total number of clients that attended each group the counselor facilitated into Column D.

If the measure is direct service hours, you might record the actual direct service hours (e.g., 18 per week) into Column D

If the measure is percent treatment completion, you would record the number of unique clients per counselor who actually successfully completed treatment into Column D.

F: Calculate the percentage: D/C for the appropriate measure.

Note: The example on the next page focuses on clients scheduled vs. seen for all individual and group sessions. You would need to adjusted the template accordingly depending on the measure.



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Palmer House

Tulsa, Oklahoma

<http://palmer-tulsa.org>

Palmer Continuum of Care, Inc. is dedicated to helping adolescents and women with their children, who struggle with substance abuse and chemical dependency. Palmer offers a range of treatment services specifically designed to address each person's individual needs and help them step back on a path to achieving their potential as healthy individuals without the use of alcohol and other drugs. Palmer's comprehensive approach to substance abuse and addiction addresses the full range of individual client, family and continuing care.

Project Aim Increase Continuation

Change Leader / Executive Sponsor Nadia Guevara

Goals & Measures

The change team's walk-through in adolescent outpatient services identified inconsistencies in counselor service delivery and performance. Counselor workloads also varied, ranging from as few as two to more than 30 clients per week. As a result the team set a goal to increase client continuation by examining counselor performance, clarifying expectations, and establishing standards.

Changes Implemented

The change team tested several changes for this project. In the first change, counselors were required to submit a detailed report of direct services in place of a time sheet that just listed hours worked. This change provided baseline data on counselor performance and also helped us to see the uneven distribution of our case loads. The second change was to share productivity reports in a weekly staff meeting. This way each counselor could see the differences in the counseling staff workload. This report showed who was working above or below capacity and resulted in the best improvement of all the changes tested; the public sharing of performance seemed to motivate and challenge staff to improve.

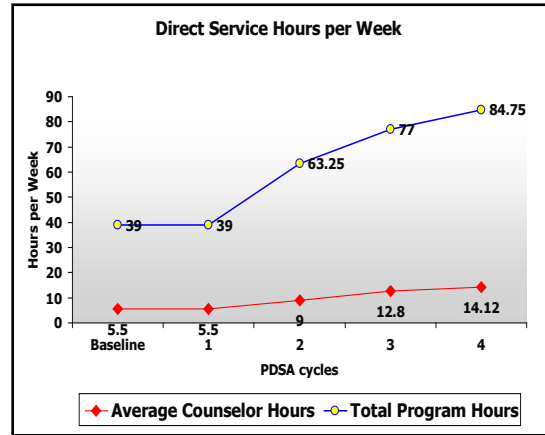
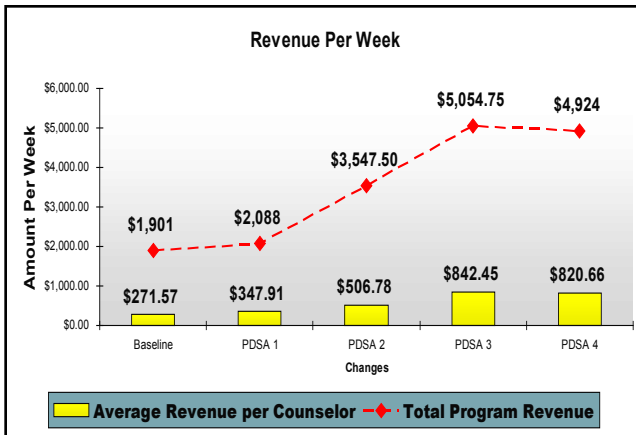
Our third project was to provide individual feedback to counselors about their performance. In these sessions, a supervisor met with a counselor to discuss the week's case load, state expectations, and brainstorm on how to increase client attendance and reduce no-shows. Counselor reaction to this change was positive, as it allowed them to discuss their performance and set goals. The fourth change was to extend the use of reminder phone calls for initial appointments only to all counseling services.



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Business Case Impact

As we completed the change cycles, we saw steady improvement in counselor performance, increase in client continuation, and revenue. (See charts) While the change project overall had a positive outcome, we did lose three counselors in part due to the closer examination of their performance and the resulting higher expectations. We recognized the need to articulate performance expectations clearly to new staff.



Lessons Learned

- Accept deficits and challenges
- Importance of looking at data
- Don't forget the basics: look at how you're serving existing clients
- Small changes can make a real difference
- Process improvement is rewarding



Additional Success Stories for Counselor Feedback

Agency	Level of Care	Change	Action Impact
Daybreak ¹	Outpatient Incentives	Provide feedback on no-shows to counselors	Show rate improved from 72 to 84%
Southwest Florida Addiction Services	Outpatient (court ordered)	Provide information on clinician productivity and require increase assessment slot availability if drops below a pre-defined target	Increased average monthly assessments by 22% Increased average monthly clients by 33% 10% increase in number of clients in treatment FY06 net profit up \$23,488
WASTAR ²		Use weighted equation to assign cases to counselors	See case study for Results

¹ http://www.niatx.net/PDF/PIPractice/CaseStudies/Daybreak_noshows.pdf

² <http://www.niatx.net/PDF/PIPractice/CaseStudies/WASTARfinal7.04.pdf>