

SOAR Dialogue Highlights

5/28/19

Attendees: Emily Carmody, Mineko Holloway, Alicia Merrill, Kathy Walker, Pamalia Davis, Stacey Costner, Hillary Jones, Christian Chambers, Connie Ness, Natasha Posey, Jessica Modra, Christina Heggins, Jane Duralia

Introductions

- Emily Carmody, NCCEH, Raleigh- Looking to schedule our trainings for the coming year, will post when we have them
- Mineko Holloway, Craven County DSS- just got trained and getting started
- Alicia Merrill, Pisgah Legal, Asheville- waiting since November for a decision on a case, decision times seem to be going slower
- Kathy Walker, Pisgah Legal, Asheville- no updates
- Pamalia Davis, Housing for New Hope, Durham- no updates
- Stacey Costner, Mental Health Association of Cleveland County- experiencing long wait times for decisions, working on recons and have a new case
- Connie Ness, Southlight, Raleigh- got presumptive disability for applicant
- Natasha Posey, Southlight, Raleigh- named as the new Program Director for SOAR at Southlight
- Jessica Modra, Mecklenburg County Mental Health Court, Charlotte- no updates

Announcements

- Be sure to submit SOAR outcomes to Emily! Annual outcome data will be due by June 30th which will be here before you know it. Please make sure your SOAR outcomes are up to date so your great work can be counted.
- SOAR Caseworkers discussed longer wait times for decisions
 - SOAR caseworkers reported waiting since November and January for decisions
 - DDS is working on a document to show their timeline and process for cases to distribute to SOAR caseworkers
 - Emily will have quarterly meetings with DDS to discuss issues with cases and will bring up these longer wait times during that meeting

SOAR Applications and Substance Use

Overview

Substance use is over-represented in the population served by SOAR. Many applicants have easier access to drugs and alcohol than healthcare and medicine to medicate disabling condition. An applicant can be approved for benefits if they have a history of substance use and/or if they are currently using.

DDS's main question is, "Is the substance use material to the disabling condition?" SOAR applications must show that the substance use is not material to the disabling condition. This means that if substance use is removed, an applicant would still have an eligible disabling condition that impacts functioning and impedes an applicant's ability to work.

Applicants can also be approved for benefits for physical and/or mental health conditions that were caused by prolonged substance use (ex. liver failure, alcohol induced dementia, etc.) as long as the conditions will not reverse if the applicant stops using.

Below are highlights from a discussion about how to address substance use in applications and show that the substance use is not material to a case.

How can you tell if substance use is not material to a case?

- Look to when substance use began. If the applicant was experiencing symptoms of disabling condition prior to use then the disabling condition was there prior to substance use. Look for evidence of this in medical records.
- Look to see if there is an explanation of substance use as a way of coping with traumatic life events. Look for evidence of this in medical records.
- Go through medical records for inpatient stays to see if disabling condition and functioning problems are still present while sober during treatment
- Talk to third parties (family, substance use provider, shelter staff) who know applicant during times of sobriety to hear about their reflections on symptoms and functioning while sober.
- Look for substance use program documentation to show documented sobriety and disabling condition
- Prison and jail records can also show times of sobriety and document symptoms and functioning

How do address substance use in electronic records that say use is active when the applicant is actually sober?

- If they have been in a treatment program during the time of the records, use the dates of the program to show the electronic records are incorrect.
- Look to emergency department records during that time to see if they show clean drug and alcohol screens

What are good engagement strategies to use to talk about substance use?

- Have peer support specialists participate in the program so they can feel there is someone who understands them in the room
- One SOAR caseworker offered that she uses a tool that she created to have an applicant walk through their timeline

If you cannot tell if an applicant's substance use is material to the disabling condition, how do you offer treatment?

- If you cannot determine if substance use is material or not, you can offer the applicant a referral to a substance use program for several months to have some documented clean time.
- Frame the conversation in a larger context of caring about the client and wanting to support them in their recovery and goals.
- Allow for time to break in the conversation so they do not have to make an immediate decision.

What do you do if records indicate that substance use triggers mental health symptoms?

- Talk to the client to get their perspective on the relationship between substance use and mental health symptoms
- If it is a current provider, contact them to discuss if the substance use is material to the condition.

Next SOAR Dialogue Call will be June 18th at 10 AM: <https://www.ncceh.org/events/1345/>