

Transcript for Whole Health Action Management Podcast

Recorded by Judith Cook and Jessica Jonikas

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JJ: Hello. My name is Jessica Jonikas. I'm here with Dr. Judith Cook, Director of the University of Illinois at Chicago Center on Integrated Health Care and Self-Directed Recovery. Today, we'll be talking about the workbook called, *Whole Health Action Management*, which is available from the UIC Solutions Suite.

JJ: Welcome to our podcast, Judith. Would you please tell our listeners about this workbook?

JC: I'll be happy to. *Whole Health Action Management* or WHAM is an intervention designed to enhance physical health and wellness among people with mental illnesses. It was developed by people in mental health recovery to help others set and work toward health goals, such as losing weight, improving nutrition, and increasing physical activity. It uses structured goal-setting to help participants succeed. It also features education about topics such as the relaxation response, and 10 evidence-based health and resiliency factors like restful sleep, healthy eating, and service to others. WHAM also provides mental health peer support for increased wellness in both one-on-one meetings and group settings.

JJ: That sounds interesting. How does it work?

JC: WHAM participants begin by identifying a health issue that they want to work on. WHAM training focuses on creating new habits on a weekly basis, and then monitoring one's progress by means of a weekly action plan. People also give and receive peer support for maintaining lifestyle changes. An important underlying principle of WHAM is that people cannot be forced or coerced into changing unhealthy lifestyle habits. Instead, these changes must be completely voluntary. In addition, people are more likely to create a healthier lifestyle when the focus is on their interests, strengths, and what they see as possible. Through these mechanisms, people find that it's easier to create new habits than to change old ones.

JJ: A recovery-oriented approach like that sounds very important. Would you describe the format used to teach WHAM?

JC: When used with a group, the WHAM intervention involves 2 components. The first is a weekly individual meeting with the WHAM instructor who is typically a certified peer specialist. The second is a weekly group meeting co-led by two trained instructors. Both components use a structured goal-setting process involving creation of a wellness action plan for the upcoming week. That plan includes a measureable weekly goal, and a strategy for reaching the goal. People also rate their degree of confidence in attaining the

coming week's goal. The group sessions seem to work best when attended by 10 to 12 people. WHAM can be offered in mental health or social service agencies, peer-run programs, community health clinics, or anywhere people can gather comfortably and privately.

JJ: Sounds like WHAM can be used in many different settings. What kinds of people might want to use the workbook?

JC: WHAM was designed for people in mental health recovery. But it can be used by anyone who wants to learn about different domains of health and wellness, as well as how to set and reach goals for healthier lifestyles.

JJ: I'm wondering whether people need specialized training to use and deliver WHAM.

JC: No experience is needed for people who want to use the workbook on their own. We recommend that people who want to teach WHAM receive training from a certified WHAM trainer. The National Council on Behavioral Health offers this training and you can find out more about it on their web site at www.thenationalcouncil.org/training-courses/whole-health-action-management. In addition, it's advisable for at least one of the teachers to have experience leading health education groups. Also, an important component of WHAM is the fact that the co-facilitators also set a health goal and follow a weekly action plan. They share their plan and report on whether they were able to reach their goal in the groups and one-on-one meetings. This helps to build everyone's empathy for the struggles faced by people who are trying to change their health habits.

JJ: That's helpful, thanks. What resources are needed to teach it?

JC: You'll need a computer, internet connection, and printer in order to download and print the 64-page workbook, as well as a private room for group and individual meetings. Other resources you'll need are pens, a flip chart or wipe-off board, and a blood pressure cuff for the session on hypertension. Also, depending on their goals and action plans, you may need to help participants find affordable exercise clothing, access to healthy foods, and other goods and services necessary for reaching their specific goals.

JJ: Before we end today, I'm hoping you'll share examples of how people are using WHAM to improve their wellness.

JC: Sure. Our Center has been conducting a study of WHAM and, so far, we've delivered it to over 125 people. The most common conditions they report dealing with are high blood pressure, high cholesterol, asthma, arthritis, and being overweight. Some examples of goals people have set include eating five healthy meals a week, another person's goal was to jog 20 minutes 2 times a week, and another person wanted to eat 7 servings of fruits and vegetables each week. We found that, regardless of the type of goal they set, over 80% were able to reach that goal after 3 months of WHAM participation. In addition, participant satisfaction has been very high. Over 80% say they like learning new

things about whole health. Over 90% say they like getting peer support for setting and reaching health goals.

JJ: Those are good illustrations of how using WHAM can help people improve their health and wellness. Thanks, Judith. And thank you to our audience for listening today. We're pleased to offer *Whole Health Action Management* as part of our Solutions Suite to promote wellness and self-direction for people in recovery from mental health conditions.

Announcer: Thank you for listening. You can obtain additional Solutions Suite recordings, or download a transcript, by visiting the Center's web site.