

UIC Solutions Suite Podcast Series

Transcript for Health Fair Manual Podcast

Recorded by Pat Nemec and Ralph Elwell

Announcer: Thank you for visiting the University of Illinois at Chicago's Health & Recovery Solutions Suite. The following recording comes to you from the UIC Center on Integrated Health Care and Self-Directed Recovery. Visit our online Solutions Suite to obtain free tools that promote health, self-direction, and employment for the behavioral health field.

RE: Hello. My name is Ralph Elwell. I have Pat Nemec with me today to talk about a useful tool that is available from the UIC Solutions Suite. The manual we are going to describe today provides directions on how to run a health fair to promote wellness for people in recovery from mental health and substance use conditions.

RE: Thanks for being here, Pat, to tell our listeners about the manual called *A Step-by-Step Guide for Planning and Conducting a Successful Health Fair*.

PN: I'm happy to be here. It's great to have the chance to tell everyone about this resource.

RE: Before describing the *Guide*, can you tell us what you mean by a health fair?

PN: Sure. A health fair is an event where a person can access brief health screenings in a number of different areas. People who attend a health fair gain general health knowledge, specific information about their own health, and tips for preventing illness and improving wellness. Probably most of our listeners have seen signs for free blood pressure screening at a local pharmacy. A health fair would also offer screenings for obesity and other factors, such as diabetes and risks for heart disease and stroke.

PN: Additional screenings might examine lifestyle risks, smoking, and substance use. Health fairs also can include information tables on self-help and other local resources, provider booths, cooking demonstrations, and even short exercise classes. A free health fair can encourage people to learn about their health status and health risks and it can be a good way to reach those people who avoid going to the doctor for whatever reason.

RE: OK, so I understand why a health fair is generally useful, but why should a behavioral health agency offer a health fair specifically for people with mental health and substance use conditions?

PN: Of course, behavioral health service providers already have a lot of responsibilities, and this may seem like one more task for an over-burdened system. However, we know that there is an urgent need to pay attention to the physical health of the people served by the public behavioral health system, because they have a high rate of medical problems and risks for disease. As a result, they tend to die much younger than people in the general public. Offering a one-stop location for health screenings specifically geared for

this group is an effective way to increase their awareness of their own health and give them the tools they need to reduce their risk of disease and early death.

RE: How can the *Step-by-Step Guide* support an agency that wants to organize a health fair?

PN: The manual is exactly what the title says it is, *A Step-by-Step Guide*. The *Guide* describes exactly how to organize a planning committee, budget for the fair, and think through the details of who you want to reach, when and where to offer the fair, and what booths or stations to include. The *Guide* provides instructions for setting up the screening stations as well as a planning checklist and handouts with medical information.

RE: What are some things to consider in planning a health fair?

PN: First of all, start planning at least 6 months in advance. The *Guide* provides information and support materials to help you plan and budget for your health fair. Be sure you think through who you want to have attend the health fair. Finding and training the right staff is important, including medically-trained personnel to do certain screenings, and peer support staff to assist people with navigating the screening and making sense of their personal results.

PN: Many materials are needed, such as supplies for each screening station, printed information sheets, and lists of local resources. Details about all of these, and examples, are included in the *Guide*. Planning also includes developing emergency protocols, in case a participant needs urgent care, and assuring privacy of health information. The *Guide* also provides recommendations for establishing a shame-free and non-judgmental environment, where participants feel safe and comfortable discussing their health habits and screening results.

RE: Thank you for your time today. We are pleased to offer *A Step-by-Step Guide for Planning and Conducting a Successful Health Fair* as part of our Solutions Suite to promote wellness 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.