

**MHSA PEI
Key Informant interview
October 7, 2008**

Interviewer: Jerry Solomon, PhD

Interviewed: Dorian Seamster, MD Health Improvement Partnership of Santa Cruz.

The interview: Ms. Seamster met at the interviewer's office on October 7, 2008 for a one-hour interview. The interview is summarized below.

Introduction

Ms. Seamster was given a brief overview of the MHSA PEI recommendations. Her importance as a stakeholder to the process was discussed. She was eager to share her experience the public health clinics and patients with mental illness and drug abuse. She stated that at one time there was a mental health provider available in the clinics and that it was a very helpful to the patients.

Ms. Seamster was asked to react to the recommendations from a Primary Care Provider (PCP) perspective. "The recommendations sound great and it would be wonderful to be able to fund them all. I'm concerned that there be adequate funding for any one strategy, to really make an impact."

Priority Need

Ms. Seamster commented on the long recognized need for mental health and social work support for clinic patients. "One of the top three priorities identified at the Safety Net Clinicians retreat was access to mental health services, particularly for the 0-5 age group."

Ms. Seamster remarked that currently PCP's often perform basic psychological assessments as well as some counseling with many of their patients. It would be very helpful to have a means of connecting PCP's with other agencies for counseling referrals. She believed that clinic staff would benefit from meeting regularly with County Mental Health staff in order to create systems for referral and feedback. She believes it would be helpful to focus on children because many are eligible for County mental health services.

When asked about on-site counseling at the clinics, Ms. Seamster acknowledged the lack of space for these services. Planned Parenthood organizes their clinic-based services by scheduling their staff when room space is available at the clinic.

Educating PCPs

"Educating PCP's to assess signs of mental illness and make appropriate referrals is a major priority." Many PCP find it difficult to keep current with medications that might be used when treating patients with depression. Therefore, specialty training in the psychopharmacological management of depression and anxiety would be very helpful.

The Health Improvement Partnership (HIP) is currently exploring offering trainings to PCP's. It would be very helpful if the PEI education program recommended by the workgroup worked in tandem with HIP's efforts to train all Pediatricians in the county.

Comments to the Steering Committee

Ms. Seamster wanted to be sure that those making the decisions regarding the recommendations understand the importance of the primary care clinics in detecting the early signs of mental illness in the community at large.

Her primary concerns are the mental health needs of children and women who present with physical symptoms that often mask or co-occur with mental illness.

Ms. Seamster was adamant about the Steering Committee making sure that the scarce financial resources that are currently available to us be used wisely and that there be community involvement throughout the process.