

A Regional Leader

Growth of Avera Behavioral Health Services exceeds expectations

BY DONNA FARRIS, AVERA MCKENNAN WRITER/EDITOR



If I rise on wings of the dawn...

"If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast." Psalm 139:9-10

The Scriptural image of "wings of the dawn" is translated into butterflies and doves as recurring themes in artwork throughout the Avera Behavioral Health Center.

Avera is leading the way in behavioral health services. While any one of these factors alone reflects excellence, together they position Avera at the level of exceptional.

- More people served than at any other private facility in our wider region.
- Investment in a \$32 million, state-of-the-art, 110-bed hospital at a time when many health organizations pulled back from spending on mental health programs.
- An expert staff of 17 psychiatrists, including four specialists in child/adolescent care and one in geriatrics, despite shortages in the medical specialty of psychiatry and its sub-specialties.
- Patient satisfaction scores near and above the 90th percentile on a 100-point scale.
- Innovative, specialized programs, offering effective help to people dealing with depression, personality disorder, addiction and more.
- Cutting-edge research combining the factors of genetics and environment to treat mental illness more effectively, and even prevent it from occurring.

Behavioral Health Services, including inpatient and outpatient care, has a 50-year history as a department within Avera McKennan Hospital & University Health Center.

"Avera's commitment to behavioral health stems from our belief in being compassionate caregivers," said

Dr. Matthew Stanley, psychiatrist with Avera University Psychiatry Associates and Behavioral Health Services medical director. "The pain of people suffering from mental illness is almost unimaginable, except that many people have experienced it themselves."

In April 2006, inpatient behavioral health care was relocated from the main hospital to the new Avera Behavioral Health Center on West 69th Street in Sioux Falls.

Exceeding expectations

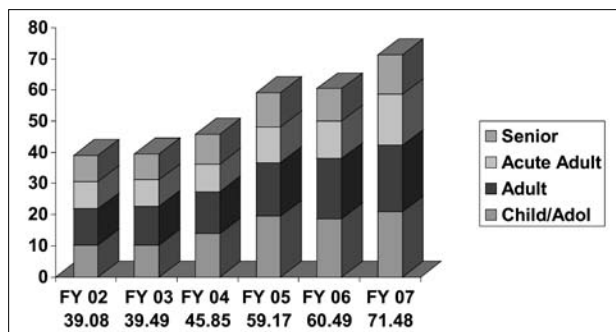
The 110-bed Avera Behavioral Health Center is the largest private mental health inpatient program in the region, with five specialized units: One adult unit for profound mental illness such as schizophrenia, another general adult unit, and units for seniors, adolescents and children. The closest private facilities which are comparable in size are Fairview Mental Health Services in Minneapolis at 118 beds, and Mayo Clinic's inpatient unit at 107 beds.

Average daily census has grown from 59 in fiscal year 2005 to over 71 in fiscal year 2007. Census at times approaches the 100 mark. Total discharges have increased from 3,988 in 2005 to 4,133 in 2007. Based on discharges, psychiatry is the top service line at Avera McKennan.

"AVERA'S COMMITMENT TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTH STEMS FROM OUR BELIEF IN BEING COMPASSIONATE CAREGIVERS." – DR. MATTHEW STANLEY, MEDICAL DIRECTOR, AVERA MCKENNAN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

“We designed this building to take us to the year 2025, based on what we thought would be consistent growth based on population,” said Steve Lindquist, assistant vice president for Avera McKennan Behavioral Health Services. “By 2025, we thought we’d be averaging 70 to 72 patients a day. We’re averaging that now.”

People are coming from greater distances, and Lindquist credits that growth to the nature of the facility as well as the high level of care and service.



Average Daily Census
Avera Behavioral Health Center

World-class facility

“Our facility has become known nationally as setting the leading edge for psychiatric treatment facilities,” Lindquist said. Careful attention was paid to creating a healing environment, emphasizing four values:

World class in design. “People have asked, where did you go to look when you designed this? The fact is, we didn’t go elsewhere. Facilities like this have not been built in the last 10 years. So we felt by looking elsewhere, we were locking ourselves into at least 10-year-old technology,” Lindquist said. Leaders from a number of hospital systems around the county have visited the Avera Behavioral Health Center to review its highly successful, unique design.

A sense of spirituality to attend to the whole person – body, mind and spirit. “We place a great emphasis on the body, mind and spirit, and our design reflects that with our use of space, light and colors,” Lindquist said. An indoor waterfall adds sound to visual cues and artwork promoting serenity.

Respect and dignity. Mental health units have often been relegated to the basement, or an out-of-the-way area of a hospital as an

Behavioral health issues touch many lives

Behavioral health issues, like depression, personality disorder, anxiety or addiction touch more people than any other single category of medical disorders.

“Actually, behavioral health is an important factor in every other type of medical specialty,” said Dr. Matthew Stanley, psychiatrist with Avera University Psychiatry Associates and medical director for Avera Behavioral Health Services. “Mental health has an impact not just in the expression of an illness, but how a patient responds to treatment of cancer, cardiovascular disease, etc.”

It’s perhaps the area of medicine that continues to change and evolve the most. “Psychiatry is still the greatest frontier in medicine,” Dr. Stanley said.

There have been significant advances in mental health. More effective medications have been released. There’s a greater understanding of the biochemical basis of mental illness – that the mind and body are part of the same medical model.

Technology now provides the ability to image the brain, and actually watch the action of chemicals in the brain.

“But there’s still so much unexplored. We keep developing more tools, and gaining a greater understanding,” Dr. Stanley said.

Psychiatrists are learning more about the role that environment plays in mental illness. “We will always need to know and understand our patients.” That includes their family connections. “We’re recognizing that we need to help families in order to help patients to succeed,” Dr. Stanley said.

Genetic research is a growing edge.

“More and more, we want to be a resource for those who are trying to be healthy,” Dr. Stanley said.

Because mental illness is talked about more in today’s society, the stigma is gradually declining. “Unfortunately, the number of people who have some form of mental illness has not declined. Therefore, almost everyone is touched by mental illness, either themselves or a loved one,” Dr. Stanley said.

The Avera psychiatry team continually strives to improve evidence-based treatment protocols. For example, Dr. Stanley and his colleagues are currently piloting a treatment protocol for major depressive disorder to “push the envelope” and standardize the best care practices based on evidence and outcomes.

No other field of medicine is as dynamic as the brain and psychiatry, Dr. Stanley said. “Everything we uncover creates a whole new area to be explored.”

afterthought. “This organization made a very deliberate decision to say we’re not going to approach behavioral health issues that way,” Lindquist said. “These are medical conditions and we should be treating folks here the same way we are treating them for heart disease or cancer.”

A safe, therapeutic environment. The patient environment is designed for peace and calmness, as well as privacy and confidentiality.

Units can be full, yet still feel calm and relaxed as opposed to chaotic and noisy. “That’s very important to the recovery process,” Lindquist said.

With offices on site for both of Avera’s major psychiatric groups – Avera University Psychiatry Associates and Avera Midwest Psychiatric Medicine – the Behavioral Health Center is a one-stop location for care. Avera Behavioral Health Outpatient Services are located on the Avera McKennan campus, in Avera Doctors Plaza 2.

“What we have developed under one roof here is unmatched not only in the region but perhaps in the country,” said Dr. Stanley.

Specialized expertise

Affiliated with the Avera Behavioral Health Center is a staff of 17 psychiatrists, as well as a team of psychologists and mid-level practitioners. That includes specialists on either end of the age spectrum – four in child and adolescent psychiatry, and one in geriatric psychiatry. Two additional child psychiatrists will join the staff this year. Outpatient services are delivered by a team of master’s and Ph.D. level psychologists, counselors and social workers,

Alongside their clinical practice, medical staff are actively involved in teaching and research. In cooperation with the Avera Research Institute and the Avera Institute for Behavioral Genetics – on site at BHC – cutting-edge research is continually under way.

Many staff physicians are part of the teaching faculty of the University of South Dakota School of Medicine Department of Psychiatry. As a teaching facility, Avera Behavioral Health Center typically has about 20 residents. Also offered through Avera is a fellowship in child psychiatry.

Pharm.D. (doctor of pharmacy) interns through the South Dakota State University School of Pharmacy also rotate through the Behavioral Health Center to learn about specialized medications used in behavioral health care.



Innovative programs

Patients’ contact with Avera Behavioral Health Services often begins with Avera’s unique 24-hour Assessment Program. Different than an after-hours call service, this intake and referral assessment center is operated by highly-trained assessment staff who help determine what level of care is necessary, anytime of the day or night, either over the phone or in person.

In 2007, the Assessment Program took 7,172 calls, did 4,831 face-to-face assessments, and 2,702 pre-certifications for care. Average calls per month have increased from 525 in 2005 to 600 in 2007. Among programs and services through Avera Behavioral Health Services:

- Truly specialized, separate inpatient areas for adults, children, adolescents and geriatric patients. Because a 7-year-old’s needs are different from a 17-year-old’s, and geriatric needs are distinct from needs of younger adults, this design helps patients receive the best possible age-appropriate care.
- Partial hospitalization for adults in a day program, which is less disruptive to family life.
- An intensive outpatient treatment program for drug, alcohol and gambling addictions. The outpatient setting allows patients to commit to an intensive program while still maintaining their employment and family life.
- An intensive outpatient evaluation track for individuals with treatment-resistant depression. After this one-day intensive evaluation, referring physicians receive recommendations to help achieve improved outcomes. This is a unique feature no other facility in the wider region offers.
- A specialized outpatient program known as STEPPS™ for people with borderline personality disorder who are prone to frequent crisis events. Research shows this program results in significant reduction in Emergency Room visits and hospitalizations. Approximately 60 clients per year take part in the 22-week format.

“WHAT WE HAVE DEVELOPED UNDER ONE ROOF HERE IS UNMATCHED NOT ONLY IN THE REGION BUT PERHAPS IN THE COUNTRY.” – DR. MATTHEW STANLEY, MEDICAL DIRECTOR

- An innovative research project known as the Avera Institute for Human Behavioral Genetics, combining the science of genetics with a family-based approach to prevent mental health conditions, and treat such illnesses more effectively.
- A state-of-the-art electroconvulsive therapy suite. ECT can be an effective treatment, typically for severe depression, when patients don't respond well or quickly enough to medications. Results include improvement in mood, motivation, interest, energy and sleep patterns.

Service Excellence

Customer satisfaction scores as compared nationally that are near or above the 90th percentile on a 100-point scale reflect a heightened priority placed on Service Excellence at the Avera Behavioral Health Center.

An "old mindset" in the mental health field was that of care providers taking authoritative control in the treatment of their patients, Lindquist said. "Now we have a sense that patients and their families are an active part of their treatment. Research shows that patients get better faster when the family is happy with the services a patient is receiving, and so patient and family satisfaction becomes a very important key in treatment and recovery."

A long-term goal of the Avera Behavioral Health Center has been to "normalize" psychiatric treatment, so people feel comfortable seeking care in their home town without fear of stigma, Lindquist said.

People are seeking services who might not have considered that option in the past. Sioux Falls residents are getting the care they need locally, rather than traveling out of town. And people are coming from a wider geographical area, Lindquist said. It's all adding up to growing numbers of people served through Avera Behavioral Health. "The word is out that this is a great place... a helpful place."

EAP: For life's everyday challenges



Issues like marital problems, conflict with co-workers, grief and stress are everyday challenges that can affect people on the job.

Through the Avera Employee Assistance Program (EAP), part of Avera McKennan Behavioral Health Services, more and more people are getting help for these common difficulties in life.

"We're seeing an increasing employer concern about the health of their employees," said Steve Lindquist, assistant vice president for Avera McKennan Behavioral Health Services. "If someone is suffering from addiction issues, depression or family distress, they are not going to be as productive on the job."

Because human resources personnel are not counselors, more and more businesses are turning to Employee Assistance Programs. In 2002, 14,600 lives were covered through Avera's EAP. Today, that number is 50,000 through Avera and 180 other employers who contract for the service.

"Employers today are really struggling to help employees juggle work and home responsibilities," said Mary Wolf, manager of Avera McKennan Behavioral Health Outpatient Services and EAP.

EAP is a "proactive benefit" that saves health insurance benefits in the long run, because people seek help sooner.

EAP offers covered employees counseling sessions, typically three per year. Companies are also offered services such as employee orientation, management training, staff retreats, professional development sessions and employee enrichment workshops.

Avera's EAP program has affiliate providers in 32 states for South Dakota-based companies with employees working in out-of-state locations.

"The nice thing about EAP is that it covers things insurance doesn't – grief and loss, marital issues, infertility issues, work-related stress and parenting," Wolf said.

A goal of EAP is to "normalize" mental health services for everyday issues, for example, kids in trouble at school, or caring for older parents, Wolf said. "The sooner people come in, the better the resolution."