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## **When Team Members Don't Agree: Improving Communication and Multidisciplinary Team Work**

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### **A. Why this Training and Needs Assessment?**

Questions to be answered include:

- How to communicate and function as a team
- What case information should be shared?
- Who needs what information?
- How can you share information appropriately?
  - (a) How to work with treatment providers who sometimes give too little or too much information, do not integrate safety/risk, etc.
  - (b) Treatment providers who sometimes give too little or too much information, do not integrate safety/risk, etc.
- What does change look like?
- What are the words to use to describe progress and change?
- Concrete suggestions for professionals of different disciplines, to develop skills they can practice and apply in their careers.

### **B. Successful Drug Courts and Best Practices**

The NADCP Standards Committee identified ten key elements of successful drug courts:

- (1) drug courts integrate alcohol and other drug treatment services with the justice system case processing
- (2) drug courts use a non-adversarial approach in which prosecution and defense counsel promote public safety while protecting participants' due process rights
- (3) eligible participants are identified and placed in the drug court program
- (4) drug courts provide access to a continuum of treatment and rehabilitation services
- (5) abstinence is frequently monitored by drug testing
- (6) sanctions and incentives that participants receive from the court and the treatment programs are organized as personalized contingency contracts
- (7) drug court participants have an ongoing judicial interaction
- (8) program effectiveness and goals are monitored and evaluated
- (9) continuing interdisciplinary education of the drug court team promotes effective drug court planning
- (10) drug court effectiveness partnerships among drug courts, public agencies and community based organizations are established

(National Association of Drug Court Professionals, 1997)

### **C. Practice Standards (NADCP)**

#### **1. Multidisciplinary Team**

“A dedicated multidisciplinary team of professionals manages the day-to-day operations of the Drug Court, including reviewing participant progress during pre-court staff meetings and status hearings, contributing observations and recommendations within team members' respective areas of expertise, and delivering or overseeing the delivery of legal, treatment and supervision services.

### **A. Team Composition**

The Drug Court team comprises representatives from all partner agencies involved in the creation of the program, including but not limited to a judge or judicial officer, program coordinator, prosecutor, defense counsel representative, treatment representative, community supervision officer, and law enforcement officer.

### **B. Pre-Court Staff Meetings**

Team members consistently attend pre-court staff meetings to review participant progress, determine appropriate actions to improve outcomes, and prepare for status hearings in court. Pre-court staff meetings are presumptively closed to participants and the public unless the court has a good reason for a participant to attend discussions related to that participant's case.

### **C. Sharing Information**

Team members share information as necessary to appraise participants' progress in treatment and compliance with the conditions of the Drug Court. Partner agencies execute memoranda of understanding (MOUs) specifying what information will be shared among team members. Participants provide voluntary and informed consent permitting team members to share specified data elements relating to participants' progress in treatment and compliance with program requirements. Defense attorneys make it clear to participants and other team members whether they will share communications from participants with the Drug Court team."

### **Data Elements to Appraise Progress**

At a minimum, following data elements are required by all treatment court team members to appraise participant progress and compliance or noncompliance with the conditions of Drug Court:

1. Assessment results pertaining to a participant's eligibility for Drug/Treatment Court and treatment and supervision needs
2. Attendance at scheduled appointments and level of active participation based on the individualized treatment plan versus passive attendance
3. Drug and alcohol test results, including efforts to defraud or invalidate said tests
4. Attainment of treatment plan goals that are focusing on attitudes, thoughts and behaviors assessed as affecting public safety and legal recidivism.
5. Evidence of symptom resolution, such as reductions in drug cravings or withdrawal symptoms.
6. Evidence of treatment-related attitudinal improvements, such as increased insight or motivation for change; behavioral and functional improvements in all assessed areas affecting public safety and legal recidivism.
7. Attainment of Drug/treatment Court phase requirements that should be based on functional change not time based phases, such as obtaining and maintaining employment or enrolling in an educational program, ability to cope with cravings to use, level of impulse control etc.
8. Compliance with electronic monitoring, home curfews, travel limitations, and geographic or associated restrictions. Non-compliance should trigger a clinical assessment and change in the treatment plan not automatic sanctions.
9. Adherence to legally prescribed and authorized medically assisted treatments.
10. Procurement of unauthorized prescriptions for addictive or intoxicating medications.
11. Commission of or arrests for new offenses.
12. Menacing, threatening, or disruptive behavior directed at staff members, participants or other persons.

### **D. Team Communication and Decision Making**

Team members contribute relevant insights, observations, and recommendations based on their professional knowledge, training, and experience.

The judge considers the perspectives of all team members before making decisions that affect participants' welfare or liberty interests and explains the rationale for such decisions to team members and participants."

(National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP), ADULT DRUG COURT BEST PRACTICE STANDARDS VOLUME II. Pages 38-39, 43 -modified)

## **REFERENCES AND RESOURCES**

“A Technical Assistance Guide For Drug Court Judges on Drug Court Treatment Services” - Bureau of Justice Assistance Drug Court Technical Assistance Project. American University, School of Public Affairs, Justice Programs Office. Lead Authors: Jeffrey N. Kushner, MHRA, State Drug Court Coordinator, Montana Supreme Court; Roger H. Peters, Ph.D., University of South Florida; Caroline S. Cooper BJA Drug Court Technical Assistance Project. School of Public Affairs, American University. May 1, 2014.

Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) training video on The ASAM Criteria that can be viewed by creating an account and going to the Adult Drug Court Lessons. The system can be found at [www.treatmentcourts.org](http://www.treatmentcourts.org) and this video was initiated by Dennis Reilly at the Center for Court innovation.

Critical Treatment Issues Webinar Series, Bureau of Justice (BJA) Drug Court Technical Assistance Project at American University Feb. 10, 2016 – May 3, 2016  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AuUEP52z1Xkj>

Mee-Lee D, Shulman GD, Fishman MJ, and Gastfriend DR, Miller MM eds. (2013). *The ASAM Criteria: Treatment Criteria for Addictive, Substance-Related, and Co-Occurring Conditions*. Third Edition. Carson City, NV: The Change Companies.

For more information on the new edition: [www.ASAMcriteria.org](http://www.ASAMcriteria.org)

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