

NASMHPD Forensic Division  
2007-2009 Priorities

In preparation for the Commissioner's Meeting in July, NASMHPD's Forensic Division has identified the five following priorities that will serve as the focus for the Division's activities over the next two years. These priorities will be addressed during the Division's Executive and Program Committee conference calls, soon to be scheduled "Meet Me" teleconference calls and annual meetings.

**Changing and Evolving Role of State Mental Health Agencies (SMHAs):**

**Priority I: Publish White Paper on Sexually Violent Predator Statutes (SVP)**

During the past 10 years an increasing number of states have enacted SVP statutes. Presently there are now 18 states with some form of SVP statutes with SMHA's having all or some responsibility for serving this population. The Forensic Division is taking the lead in authoring an updated SVP White Paper on SVP Statutes for presentation to the Commissioner's at their July Meeting.

**Strengthening Organizational Partnerships:**

**Priority II: Establish Partnerships with Criminal Justice Agencies**

The role SMHAs in the delivery of public mental health services has changed markedly in the past 25 years. With respect to the delivery of forensic mental health services, changes have occurred both in the locus of care and populations served. Increasingly, the locus of forensic mental health services is shifting from institutional settings operated by SMHAs to community based and criminal justice settings. The change in the locus of care has resulted in an increase in the number of individuals with mental illness who become involved in the criminal justice system thereby placing increased demands on local law enforcement and state corrections. This shift in the locus of care has also resulted in the increasing use of statutes governing competency to stand trial as a pathway to access inpatient psychiatric care. As the number of defendants being ordered to state psychiatric facilities (predominantly as incompetent to stand trial) increases, some states have experienced overcrowding in their forensic bed capacities. This further impacts local jails which often hold these individuals until a bed becomes available.

The Forensic Division also realizes the need to promote models of community mental health treatment that embrace the multiple needs of this population to prevent or at least minimize the extent of involvement in the criminal justice system. This includes the education of legislators and policymakers on the efficiencies and effectiveness of community-based treatment models for a

significant subset of the forensic population as well as the need to establish partnerships with criminal justice agencies to create opportunities for jail diversion and re-entry services for persons with mental illness.

### **Integration of Health and Mental Health:**

#### **Priority III: Integrate Health and Mental Health Services to reduce morbidity for Seriously Mentally Ill (SMI) Forensic clients.**

Mortality rates are astonishingly high with data indicating that persons with serious mental illness have a shorter life expectancy than the general population. The prevalence of obesity, diabetes, heart diseases and HIV among the SMI requires that our service organizations adopt a holistic approach to caring for our population and that we critically examine the effectiveness of our services including prescribing practices of physicians working within our programs.

#### **Priority IV: Reduce Restraint and Seclusion:**

The Forensic Division continues to view the reduction of restraint and seclusion as a major priority for our respective programs.

### **Workforce Development:**

#### **Priority V: Identify Strategies to Recruit and Retain Qualified Professionals**

An aging workforce, fiscal considerations including the inability to offer competitive salaries and reduced enrollment at institutions of higher learning in core professions such as psychiatry and nursing compromise SMHAs' ability to recruit and retain qualified professionals to serve our population. Identifying strategies to recruit and retain key professional staff will be a focus of the Forensic Divisions activities over the next to years.