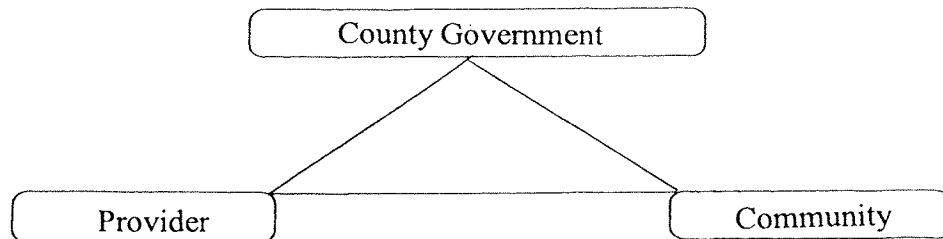


PUBLIC MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN WISCONSIN: BASIC SOCIAL CONTRACT

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April, 2011

The basic structure of the social contract for public mental health services in Wisconsin consists of three parties and can be depicted visually as follows:



This is the basic framework, with County Government identified as one of the parties, Provider identified as another party, and Community, the third party to this contract. Each of these entities has various characteristics and parts.

County Government includes the County Board of Supervisors and the various subcommittees of this board, such as the Human Services Board. It also includes several departments established to carry out the “mission” of the county government. County government itself was created by the state government, namely the legislature and the governor. The State of Wisconsin provides the framework for County Government through statutes and administrative rules. The authority and rules of operating county government are contained in these legislative documents, such as s. Chapter 51, Wisconsin Statutes, which sets up the structure and the operation of mental health services in each county in the state. The County Board of Supervisors decides local issues of funding and administering the county departments, which include Public Health, Human Services, Sheriff, and Highways. Members of the County Board of Supervisors are elected from their districts within the county.

The Community refers to the residents and the citizenry of the county, living in cities, towns and villages. All of the citizens are served in one way or another by county government. No citizen is totally independent, no matter their status; all are simultaneously constituents and wards of government, to a greater or lesser degree; people are actual or potential candidates for services in any category. Most of the adults in the community work to support their families, pay their bills, and try to enjoy life. They send their children to school; they want their communities to be safe; they want to take care of their own, and to have a “happy” community and neighborhood. However, this picture of happiness cannot be perfectly attained, as human behavior often fails to meet the ideal. People go astray; people get distracted, overwhelmed, and sometimes

don't do what they "should" do, or what is best for them in the long-run. Also, each person is a mix of strengths and weaknesses, and human beings are challenged by outside forces over which they may have very little direct control. The "state of the world" often brings forces to bear on people, great and small, to which they will have to respond. Not all of these responses are going to be positive, making themselves and others around them vulnerable. Such is the human condition. People's vulnerability, whatever its source, obligates the government to provide safeguards and supports to its citizens.

When things go wrong in people's lives, sometimes it is necessary for outside authorities to intervene to get things moving in the right direction; it may be necessary to intercept people who have troubles or who exhibit bad behavior so that others are protected. Government also has an obligation to support people by providing resources that improve their strengths and skills. Government, including county government, has an obligation to both support and protect citizens, and to perform these duties simultaneously.

The support and control functions of county government flow from the various departments identified above. County government supplies resources to citizens so that they can get to work, go to school, foster their health, or take care of their children and elderly parents. County government supplies resources and supports to reduce vulnerability of people living in the community. This duty is encapsulated in the phrase, often seen on police squad cars, "To Protect and To Serve".

This is where Providers enter into this picture, as part of the basic social contract. Public mental health is one set of providers offered by county government to assist the citizens in the county. This group consists of mental health professionals who "protect and serve" by addressing the mental health problems of people in the community. Public mental health providers receive their mandate through laws established by the State of Wisconsin. The county Department of Human Services provides these mental health professionals, and their various programs, through direct employment by the county, or through a contract for services. In the latter case, the mental health professionals become contracted employees of the county. The professionals in the public mental health system are subject to the decisions of the various officials and policy makers who administer County Government. However, the public mental health professionals also are subject to the direct demands of the citizenry who have mental health problems, and that citizenry must have access to these services, otherwise government will be unable to fulfill its mission to "protect and serve". Access to services must be either through "voluntary" or "involuntary" arrangements, depending on circumstances. The public mental health professionals bring to bear expertise not otherwise possessed by the government, for addressing mental health problems in the community.

Contained within the overall social contract depicted above is a second level of agreements and understandings among the primary parties. The county contracts with its providers, either as employees or as vendors. This occurs on an annual basis. Likewise the provider contracts with the citizen who seeks services. When somebody enters services the mental health provider makes an agreement with the individual, setting forth

the terms and conditions of services and mutual responsibilities. Thus, people entering the outpatient clinic, for instance, contract with the mental health professional for those services. This service contract contains both fiduciary and treatment agreements. The service contract between provider and recipient is separate and distinct from the contract set up between government and the provider. A third contract is also contained in this structure, that between the citizens and their government. Although this is not always stated directly, it is implicit in the behavior of the parties. The county certainly has a stake in the matter, when someone has a mental health problem, because of government's obligation to protect and serve. Likewise, the citizens have an interest in the operation of their government, although many don't see how government helps them and others in the community.

We have herein the outline of the basic social contract for public mental health. All three of these parties to the contract have formal or informal authority which the other parts do not have, as well as separate interests to some extent. Politics, with its attendant funding priorities, plays into this mix, sometimes benefiting the basic social contract and sometimes not. On the political level, competition between interests is sometimes intense and may threaten to unbalance things to the point that the basic social contract no longer operates for individuals or for groups. Balance in this "system" is achieved best by voicing the essential moral narrative underlying it.

In summary, these three categories are the basic frame for public mental health services in Wisconsin. All public mental health operations in Wisconsin are "county based". The providers may be employed by the county or contracted by the county. Contracted providers are an "extension" of county operations, with the same basic functions as providers who are employed by the county. The community of people living in the county is why we have public mental health services in the first place. A portion of the citizens are vulnerable due to having problems that fall in the category of "mental health". The responsibilities of mental health providers go in three directions at once, due to the basic social contract: (1) toward the administrative requirements of the county government, (2) toward the community and its citizens, and (3) toward the body of knowledge informing standards for providing mental health care in the public sector. This social contract, at base, is a "moral enterprise". The whole system is engaged in finding answers to the fundamentally moral questions entailed in striking the proper balance between the interests of the separate parties to this social agreement.