You Are Not Alone in Substance Use Recovery

Battling the disease of addiction is challenging no matter the circumstances, and can be even more so in a pandemic.

St. Lawrence Health System’s Substance Use Disorder Services (SUDS) has continued to assist patients with safe, individualized, and compassionate care.

Physically, persons with substance use disorder may be more vulnerable to complications from COVID-19 due to the impact of these substances on respiratory and pulmonary health. Addiction has been referred to as a “disease of isolation” with human connection being at the core of recovery. For persons in recovery, attending the program for individual and group is an outlet in itself. In these times, it’s more important than ever for those in recovery to maintain and nurture their healthy social and emotional connections.

“We have remained open for essential services that cannot be done via telemedicine, and continue to offer an array of outpatient therapy via telehealth,” according to the Director of Outpatient Substance Use Disorder Services Emma Brackett, LCSW, CASAC.

Individual and group therapy is available via telehealth through phone, smart phone, and computer access. The free smart phone app has been very popular, and allows patients the ability to find a place to call in from a location they feel comfortable.

“We have a secure platform that is HIPPA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) compliant, and plan to continue with telehealth services as a permanent option for care,” Ms. Brackett said.

The SLHS SUD program offers a complete range of programs with an integrated philosophy that seeks to treat the whole person. Inpatient detoxification may be the first step for the person who cannot stay sober, and he/she is provided with blood work and a physical, along with treatment. Inpatient rehabilitation is offered in a structured environment with a low clinician to patient ratio, and typically lasts longer than detox.

“St. Lawrence Health System provides services along the entire spectrum to meet someone wherever they are in their recovery.” Ms. Brackett stated. “No matter which service our patients need, we will do an evaluation to determine the proper course of treatment. It’s not always the frequency of how often a person uses that matters most, but the impact it has on their life. We seek to improve their overall quality of life.”
“The integrated treatment program recognizes that Substance Use Disorders and Mental Health Disorders often co-occur. We work together as a comprehensive team of licensed physicians, nurse practitioners, clinical social workers, nurses, credentialed substance use counselors, and mental health professionals to address the problems of the people we serve,” Ms. Brackett said.

“We utilize a trauma-informed approach, making efforts to provide a safe environment that builds on people’s strengths to empower them to resolve past self-defeating patterns and create new choices for themselves,” she added.

The SUDS line offers Family Counseling Services for those who live with or have a loved one who has an addiction. Many people are often impacted by a patient’s substance use, and help is available for family members working to assist in their loved one’s recovery. Additional outpatient SUDS include the Maternal Wraparound Program for pregnant women, Impaired Driver Screening, Medication Assisted Treatment, and Canine Assisted Therapy.

Patients from close-knit communities such as those in St. Lawrence County often avoid treatment because of a perceived stigma, or out of concern that members of the community will find out. All of the SUDS team members are fully licensed professionals who adhere to the strictest professional standards of confidentiality and patient care. Every step in the recovery process is focused on helping the individual heal, and treatment is always individualized, compassionate, and confidential.

“You are not alone. We are here to support you, take you seriously, and do not judge you. Many people don’t realize how common their situation is,” Ms. Brackett said.

“Part of the SUDS philosophy states, ‘Without treatment or engagement in recovery activities, addiction is progressive.’ It is important for people who need help to seek it,” stated Psychiatrist Joseph Zollo, MD. “Substance Use Disorder Services can improve a patient’s health, safety, relationships, and ability to work. Our wide range of services are available to those in need.”

For information on outpatient SUDS in Potsdam, call (315) 353-2572; or in Gouverneur, call (315) 261-6333. Information on inpatient detoxification services in Gouverneur is available at (315) 261-5969; and for inpatient Rehabilitation at (315) 261-5954. For a comprehensive list of services, visit https://www.stlawrencehealthsystem.org/services/substance-use-disorder.