

ASAM Criteria in SUD Treatment



As of July of 2017, our Substance Use Disorder (SUD) division staff and providers have made some significant changes in how SUD levels of care are organized and how care is delivered. These changes involve the use of the ASAM Criteria.

What is ASAM?

The American Society of Addiction Medicine is the nation's leading professional society representing over 4,600 physicians, clinicians, and associated professionals in the field of addiction medicine. ASAM is dedicated to increasing access and improving the quality of addiction treatment, educating physicians and the public, supporting research and prevention, and promoting the appropriate role of physicians in the care of patients with addiction.

What is the ASAM Criteria?

It is a national set of criteria for providing outcome and results-based care in the treatment of addiction. The ASAM Criteria is the most widely used and comprehensive set of guidelines for placement, continued stay and transfer/discharge of patients with addiction and co-occurring conditions. Assessment and placement are centered around six dimensions and severity risk ratings in each. This gives a holistic picture of the individual's skills, strengths and resources available to succeed in treatment.

Why are we using it?

The ASAM Criteria was developed by a large group of leading medical professionals, and it is currently required in 30 states. The Department of Healthcare Services recognizes that this set of guidelines will provide the basis for improved outcomes in the field of treatment for substance use disorders, therefore included this requirement in the Drug MediCal Organized Delivery System (DMC-ODS) waiver. Kern county is opting into this waiver, which will provide higher quality services to individuals in our community.

What are some of the benefits for the individuals we serve?

Utilizing the ASAM criteria will remove the fixed length of stay for treatment programs (45 days in residential or 6 months in outpatient), which will ensure that individuals are working toward meeting their goals. A successful course of treatment will no longer include a laundry list of program requirements, but an overall evaluation of the improvements that clients are making in maintaining abstinence, addressing mental health conditions, attending to their physical needs, improving relationships and participating in the community. Treatment providers will emphasize motivational enhancement as part of initial engagement in treatment, continuing to move away from the notion that clients must "be ready" or "hit rock bottom" to benefit from treatment.

As changes continue over the course of the next year, the SUD Division will continue to provide Kern BHRS staff with updates. More to come!



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