

# New Project to Target Healthy Living for Smokers with Serious Mental Illness

by Jill M Williams, MD

The New Jersey Division of Mental Health Services (NJ DMHS) is taking a lead in improving the standard of care for people who smoke and suffer from mental illnesses. Nicotine dependence is the most common substance use disorder in the general population in the United States and the world. Of all the cigarettes consumed in the United States, individuals with mental illness consume 44% (Lasser 2000). Despite these statistics, little is being done to address tobacco dependence in most mental health settings.

The New Jersey DMHS has partnered with the UMDNJ-UBHC Center for Excellence and UMDNJ-RWJMS, Department of Psychiatry and UMDNJ-School of Public Health, Tobacco Dependence Program to develop a new program called Learning about Healthy Living. Drs. Jill Williams and Douglas Ziedonis have led the group in writing a manualized treatment approach to help smokers with serious mental illness. The manual is being utilized in six partial hospital/day treatment mental health sites in New Jersey this year as part of larger NJ DMHS-UMDNJ-UBHC collaboration called, "Bridging the Gap Between Physical and Mental Health." As part of the pilot implementation, the staff working in these mental health treatment sites is receiving training in tobacco dependence assessment and treatment. Nancy Speelman of the UMDNJ-Tobacco Dependence Program is coordinating the trainings and working on-site with staff to provide them with ongoing support and supervision. For many of the mental health staff this is their first experience addressing tobacco. The aim of the treatment manual is to provide a format to address tobacco

in smokers with a serious mental illness who may not be ready to quit smoking or may not even be contemplating quitting. Ideally, all smoking clients with serious mental illness are potential candidates for this group treatment.

The goals of Learning about Healthy Living are to help clients to gain knowledge and motivation to work towards a tobacco-free lifestyle and to help them to develop the skills that will assist them to quit using tobacco and live a healthier life. The treatment uses a group format that is easily implemented in most mental health settings and provides additional support to group members. An instructor's guide accompanies each chapter in the treatment manual that helps to guide the group facilitator through each session. Although the focus of the group sessions is on tobacco, there are also topics on exercise, diet and stress management.



*On December 15, 2004 Mary Jo Codey (center), wife of acting NJ Governor Richard Codey, visited with participants from Cape Counseling, Richard Hall MHC, UCPC Behavioral Health and staff of UMDNJ/UBHC at a Learning About Healthy Living training. The collaborative project teaches professionals how to treat consumers with mental illness and tobacco dependence.*