

Clearing misconceptions about mental health



**KEITH MASSAWAY, DIRECTOR,
UNIT III**

The tribe is very active in the national direction of many programs and we need to be. I spent a week in Washington,

D.C., at an annual meeting of the Tribal Technical Advisory Committee (TTAC) of Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). After the TTAC meeting, we get together with the other committees that have input on how the SAMHSA vision and future should look.

We worked on three major areas. The first was on how integration would be achieved with the services and the plans of SAMHSA. TTAC worked on the model by treating the whole person, the holistic approach. An example is that someone comes in with a specific problem, alcohol, substance abuse or mental illness. Currently the practice is to treat the patient by treating the symptoms. We proposed a

methodology that the first professional contact (the entry point into the system) the person is diagnosed but is then also evaluated in many ways.

Questions are asked to determine the roots to the problem, back story and triggers of the event and then a comprehensive approach of many professionals and para-professionals can better evaluate and alleviate the problem with lasting effect. Sounds easy, but changing an entire health care system's basic way of thinking is a daunting task. We believe it is worth the effort.

Next, we discussed how the general public views mental health and mental illness. It seems that mental health is confused with mental illness. Mental health is the promotion

of healthy thinking and actions, normal expression and feelings. Mental health is what we strive for. It is a well functioning human being. Mental illness is exactly the opposite. It is the illness of the mind. If you'll notice, the entire professional system is a mental health program. Fighting and working to instill mental health services for everyone.

We discussed how we have to better separate these two messages and show that everyone needs a healthy mind.

The last major conversation swirled around consultation and partnerships. I believe tribes have seen great improvements in consultation with the federal government and its branches. Where the breakdown seems to

be the greatest is between the states and the tribes. Many of the states receive funds both for the states' people and the tribes' members. They seem to fail to understand that consultation is a means for both sides to explore and understand how to mutually work together with the funds and programs. Their idea of consultation is to ask the tribes to give input and then they do whatever they had already planned to do regardless of the input. Mutual stories came from numerous tribes from throughout the country.

Thank you for all the e-mails and phone calls.

Keith Massaway, 702 Hazelton St., St. Ignace MI 49781, kmassaway@msn.com, (906) 643 6981.