

PROMISING PRACTICES

Innovation in

Human Services

Innovative response to collapsing news industry

Part 2 of a 2-part series

Kennebec Behavioral Health's 330 staff members and 4 clinics serve 12,000 Maine consumers. In December 2010, the service provider achieved three-year [CARF](#) accreditation with several commendations, including one for its successful placement of mental health stories in regional news publications.

By Thomas J. McAdam, Kennebec Behavioral Health

Healthcare service providers can take advantage of new opportunities to get their stories placed into newspapers, in part because of dwindling numbers of reporters in the stressed print news media. [Kennebec Behavioral Health](#) (KBH) has successfully capitalized on this opportunity in central Maine to help destigmatize mental illnesses.

This communications strategy requires a bit of legwork, diplomacy, and writing timely stories as a reporter would do. Not surprisingly, this informative approach to KBH's communications strategy was designed by a former newspaper editor who was hired as the service provider's communications director.

In today's economy and shift to electronic media, newspapers have had to lay off so many reporters that editors often can't fill their news pages with locally oriented stories -- a premium requirement for editors whose mission is to provide local and relevant news.

George Myers Jr., KBH's communications director, has been writing feature stories about mental illness, substance abuse, and sometimes about KBH itself and offering these pieces to weekly and monthly newspapers at no cost. "We see the process as a public service," Myers said. Newspapers see it as a pipeline to useful, free, localized content. This

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Volume 2, Issue 3
June 2011

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approach permits us to shine a light on healthcare issues for which reporters typically have little time."

Other service providers can duplicate KBH's effort. For example, newspaper editors in most locales would welcome news features about:

- Seasonal affective disorder during the winter.
- The rise in depression and what to do about it around the holiday season.
- Mentally healthy ways to celebrate holidays that don't cost money.
- Topical wellness issues that service providers can localize through census data or other regional resources.
- The service provider's programs to commemorate a major anniversary, such as 50 years of serving the community.

Once published, KBH archives these stories on KBH's website so that stakeholders, board members, and the public can readily see that the service provider is engaged in the community and driving mental health conversations in positive directions.

In a past issue of [BH Promising Practices](#), KBH's billing efficiencies were featured.

For more information, write Thomas J. McAdam, CEO, Kennebec Behavioral Health, at tmcadam@kbhmaine.org. Visit KBH's website at www.kbhmaine.org.