Making the Call

TLC QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER
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TLC Recruitment Success Story: *Wilkes-Barre (PA) VAMC*

Left to Right: Dr. Bina Ahmed, Chief, Primary Care Services; Paula Montross, MOVE! Coordinator; Crystal Newcomb, Clinical Social Worker; Dr. Tim Lomauro, HBC; Dr. Jillian Snyder, Clinical Pharmacy Specialist; Tammy Evans, Nurse Manager, Primary Care Services.

Several months ago, as the Wilkes-Barre VAMC began the TLC pilot program, HBC Dr. Timothy Lomauro began sending staff an informative e-mail to start each month. "I worked with the Chief of Staff's office to send a monthly e-mail to clinicians to inform and update them about this relatively new program," he explains. "Staff members have found these e-mails—which include NCP's comprehensive program information and additional documents like process flow sheets and goal-setting guidance—to be really helpful." Lomauro believes that using e-mail to keep the program "top of mind" for staff has been one of several initiatives that has helped produce the 34 percent increase in TLC recruitment that the facility achieved from June to July of 2012.

Face-To-Face

Lomauro, who is a clinical psychologist as well as the VAMC's Tobacco Cessation Coordinator, has augmented the regular e-mails with face-to-face meetings. "Showing staff how to do a 'good' TLC referral is key, and we've brought this knowledge right to them, in their clinics," he says. "I regularly present in the Primary Care Clinic, have gone to the Mental Health Clinic, visited with individual MOVE!® staff, and met with small groups at departmental service meetings, for example, to educate them on TLC initiation and consultation. I think that this kind of personalized approach and persistence has really paid off in terms of program uptake and success."

Integration

Lomauro has also integrated TLC into the existing HPDP programs offered at the VAMC and its six CBOCs. "I am the facilitator for our TEACH and MI training classes, and I always include a segment on TLC," he reports. "I go over the TLC basics and do demos in CPRS to show clinicians how to enter consults. The feedback on this instruction has been very positive." Wilkes-Barre's MOVE!® Program has been another program that lends itself well to TLC promotion. "We often get TLC consults from our MOVE!® Education and Support groups. So we've made it a point to go to the final MOVE!® class that Veterans attend here and present about clinical telehealth and TLC," Lomauro says. "We want Veterans to be aware of the great support that is available from the TLC program, and how it can help them to maintain their healthy lifestyles."

Wired

As at other facilities, Lomauro has found that technology is an effective way to spread the TLC message. "Although I routinely travel to the CBOCs to facilitate education on HPDP activities and programs, including TLC, we're also relying on different media and technologies to get the word out," he explains. "We post TLC information—articles, quotes, slides, etc.—on our facility's Web site, but we also use electronic message boards and TV monitors located around the facility to display basic TLC content and the TLC video." In the future, Lomauro hopes to upgrade these displays in more locations to more dynamically promote TLC along with the HLMs and tobacco cessation activities.

Initial feedback on TLC has been great from both staff and patients at Wilkes-Barre. "Having another effective resource to help patients is something the providers like," says Lomauro. "And TLC provides the outreach that's needed for older and more distant Veterans, with greater convenience for younger Veterans, who are often at work during the day." Lomauro relates that TLC patients also appreciate the coaching interactions. "A Veteran enrolled in the VAMC's Stress Reduction group told me that he really values the personal contact with his TLC coach, in part because he lives alone and appreciates the kind of caring contact he receives," he says.

Push

Moving into 2013, Lomauro has specific plans for continuing to promote TLC at the VAMC and its clinics. He thinks that social media is a great way to advertise TLC, and also

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Motivated, Energized, Active: *A Q&A with Veteran Thomas Gabler, who explains how TLC helped him reach his weight loss goal*

Tell us about your previous weight loss efforts.
Gabler: "I never stuck with weight loss in the past—I saw it as a temporary thing."

What motivated you to get started with TLC, and what goal did you set?
Gabler: "I started feeling short of breath, so I talked with my doctor at the Butler (PA) VAMC. He recommended TLC, and I decided to make losing weight my health goal."

What about TLC has worked for you?
Gabler: "I like the dedicated, personal health coach, and the accountability that comes with that. The information we discuss in the coaching calls helps me stay on track toward my goal. The whole program is designed to reinforce your motivation."

Why has the TLC health coach been so effective for you?
Gabler: "My coach helps steer me in the right direction, and I like being able to report my progress to my coach. Each session is a good reminder to stay healthy—I always feel better and more motivated after the session."

Have you met your goal with TLC?
Gabler:"I started in April 2012, and lost 10 pounds in 2 months. That's about half of my weight loss goal, but I've maintained that loss for 2 months. I'm not short of breath any more, and I feel motivated and energized to stay active."

Even a little weight loss goes a long way.

How is your life different now?
Gabler:"I'm much more active now. I don't tire as easily, in addition to walking, I'm able to do a lot more activities."

What do you do now to stay healthy?
Gabler: "I use a pedometer and log 10,000 steps per day. I've learned how to count calories and I keep a food journal. I've also changed my diet—I'm eating smaller portions and more fruits and vegetables, cutting out fried foods, and switching from whole milk to 2 percent."

What do you want other Veterans to know about TLC?
Gabler:"No program works unless you stick with it. If you're honest with your coach and yourself, TLC will work for you!"

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envisions it in the new patient orientation.

"We want to give Veterans more than just basic information and handouts during the roughly 2-hour new patient orientation that we do here," he explains. "So we'll soon be introducing TLC, the HLMs, and a short wellness goal-setting exercise into the orientation session, to provide Veterans the opportunity to start on improving their health at the outset of their VA care experience."

Lomauro will continue to work with the great team at Wilkes-Barre that has helped ensure TLC's success. "A number of other staff members have been critical to the program," he says. "MOVE!® Program Coordinator Paola Montross, staff psychologist Dr. Christy Rothermel, social worker Crystal Newcomb, and lead Primary Care nurse manager Tammy Evans have contributed greatly. Also, Leaders such as Chief of Primary Care Dr. Bina Ahmed and Chief of Nutrition and Food Services Melissa Novak have been very supportive of TLC. It's been a truly collaborative effort and great to see staff working together to improve HPDP services and Veteran health."

Coaches Corner

Coach Barbra is working with a Veteran who has completed seven coaching calls to date and has been tobacco free since December 24, 2012. During a recent coaching call she shared the following about her experience with TLC, "It really makes such a huge difference, just knowing that someone's going to call. It really is a big part of the motivation for me to stay quit. I want to be able to give my coach good news, and I know I can't do that if I smoke."

Registered Dietitian, Jane, and **Coach Laura** have been working with a TLC participant with a weight loss goal. This participant says, "Talking to my coach and having a workbook to use to food journal in helped me lose 32 pounds since joining TLC. I noticed a lot of improvement in my legs and my knees don't hurt as badly. My blood glucose has improved so I'm on less insulin now. I like how accessible the program is, and talking to my coach really helps. It's a good program that I'm very thankful to be a part of!"

TLC Healthy Living Goal: Be Tobacco Free

Quitting tobacco use is definitely a difficult thing to do, and it often takes multiple tries before successfully quitting for good. If you are thinking about quitting, and would like some help with this, ask your healthcare provider if TLC is right for you.

Here are some of the benefits of quitting:

Many people who quit smoking are surprised by how good they feel!

They feel in charge

- They don't need to smoke
- They don't have to find places to smoke
- They don't have to worry about their smoke bothering others

They smell good

- Their hair, clothes, and breath don't smell like smoke
- Their cars, homes, and kids don't smell like smoke
- They can better smell food and other good smells

They feel more relaxed

- They don't have to make sure they always have cigarettes
- They have more money
- They are not as worried about their health

They look and feel better

- They feel good about being able to quit
- Their skin looks healthier
- They have more energy when they walk, play with their kids, or do something active

Putting a stop to Smoky Thinking

It can be easy to lose sight of the benefits of quitting when a strong craving for a cigarette hits. You might start to lose your focus on staying smokefree. So if you are giving yourself a reason to smoke, you are probably experiencing an attack of smoky thinking. We can help you clear it up!

Here are some examples of **Smoky Thinking** and the **Clear Thinking** you can use instead.

Smoky Thinking: "I just need one cigarette to take the edge off these cravings."
Clear Thinking: "Cravings become weaker and less frequent with every day that I don't smoke. Even just one puff will feed the cravings and make them stronger. I'm going to take some deep breaths and go for a short walk."

Smoky Thinking: "The urge to smoke is just too strong. I can't stand it."
Clear Thinking: "Even the strongest cravings last less than 3 minutes. The urge will go away whether I smoke or not, and smoking now will just make it even harder for me to quit later. I can find something else to do – anything – until the craving goes away."

Smoky Thinking: "I blew it. I smoked a cigarette. I might as well go ahead and finish the pack."
Clear Thinking: "I am still learning how to be a non-smoker. It's normal to make some mistakes. But I don't have to smoke that next cigarette. I can learn from this mistake and keep going forward."

Smoky Thinking: "I can't deal with never being able to have another cigarette for the rest of my life."
Clear Thinking: "I only have to deal with today. Quitting happens one day at a time, sometimes one hour at a time! The future will take care of itself."

Smoky Thinking: "I've been smoking for so long; quitting won't make a difference now."
Clear Thinking: "No matter how long I've been smoking, my body will benefit from quitting. The healing process starts right away, and before long I will start to feel healthier."

Attaining and Maintaining: TLC Coach Michelle Helps Veteran Stephen Jaworski Quit Tobacco for Good

When health concerns started to weigh on the mind of long-time smoker and Veteran Stephen Jaworski, he knew it was time to make a big lifestyle change. "I'd smoked since I was around 12 years old, and quit only for a brief time during Army basic training," he explains. "But I started back up soon after that, when I was deployed." At the peak of his cigarette habit, Stephen estimates he was smoking a pack or more each day.

Didn't Really Work

Stephen's previous attempts to quit, using Chantix® (varenicline) and nicotine gum, had not gone well. "I had limited success—I smoked well into the time that you were supposed to stop smoking with Chantix®," he says. "So I stopped taking it because I didn't want to waste my money on something that didn't really work." The gum didn't help Stephen much either: he would chew it while at his smoke-free work place, but would often find himself lighting up after work.

Embracing It

A trip to the Erie (PA) VAMC in April of 2012 helped the 27-year-old Veteran get on the right track to kicking the tobacco habit once and for all. "I went to my annual appointment at the OEF/OIF/OND clinic, discussed my concerns with my provider, and told her I really wanted to quit," he says. "She helped me get nicotine patches and enroll in the TLC Program." Initially, Stephen was unsure about participating. But when he got his TLC materials in the mail and had his first call with his coach, he knew he was ready. "I started to embrace it then," Stephen says. "I went from being ambivalent about TLC to being excited about actively working toward my goal of quitting."

Care and Concern

Stephen feels that the combination of nicotine replacement therapy and a TLC coach has really helped him attain and maintain his abstinence. Although his family has been supportive, his coach's care, concern, and guidance have helped him get to where he is today. "My coach Michelle is very knowledgeable and she genuinely cares," Stephen says. "Having that support and structure, and someone to serve as a 'watchdog,' really helps keep me in check. To have a stranger care about me enough to call every week or every other week is really something else. It gives me the motivation to quit for myself and for somebody else."

Homework assignments after every coaching call and the workbooks Stephen's received through the program have also contributed to his success—by keeping him focused on what he's doing and why he's doing it.

Breathing Easier

After initial referral in early April 2012, Stephen completed several weekly calls and just recently stepped down to bi-weekly coaching calls. "The call intervals always seem appropriate and the topics I discuss during each call correspond nicely with the things that I'm dealing with," he says. "I'm happy to report that I've been tobacco free since starting the program!" Now instead of smoking, he says that he chews mints, sips water, and uses nicotine patches as-needed to help suppress his tobacco cravings.

> ***"The call intervals always seem appropriate and the topics I discuss during each call correspond nicely with the things that I'm dealing with."***

Quitting tobacco has made Stephen's life different in more ways than one. "There are foods that I thought I liked, but now that I can taste and smell them, I have a different opinion," he explains. "The biggest thing though, is that I can breathe. I just feel healthier and it's easier to take a breath." Stephen's also slowly making a new group of friends who are non-smokers. "I don't stink anymore from the cigarettes," he says half-jokingly, "or at least I don't think I do!"

With several months of smoke-free living under his belt, Stephen doesn't hesitate to endorse TLC for his fellow Veterans. "TLC has really helped me—it's like having a noncommissioned officer checking in on you regularly and making sure that you are not doing things that you shouldn't be doing," he says. "If you want to quit or you think you want to quit but aren't totally sure, just give it a try!"

Real Participant Stories:
Three Veteran Participants tell their stories

1. Losing 70 pounds is no small task, but it's one achieved by a participant working with Coach Holly in the Telephone Lifestyle Coaching program.

"I was morbidly obese and was on many medications," the participant reports. "Now I am almost off every one of those medications, except for one for my cholesterol. To be able to do that without having to go through a bypass surgery is huge."

The telephone coaching program allows participants to receive support on their own timeline, at their own convenience. Many veterans struggle with attending appointments in person, so telephone coaching allows them to get the help they need wherever they are and at a time that works for them. This particular participant credits his TLC coach with providing the tools needed to make a difference.

"The way your program is situated, Coach Holly's ability to listen and guide was done phenomenally well. … She was nonjudgmental and knowledgeable. … I couldn't have done it without her."

2. "Eating better, sleeping better, and breath- ing better." Those are three key benefits a participant working with Coach Marlie reports on his progress since joining the TLC program in mid-April.

The success measures out to 20 pounds lost in five months. Even more noteworthy than overall health is the fact he joined shortly after being diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes. Since joining the program, his HbA1c has decreased from 12 percent to 6.

The TLC program provides resources for individuals to measure their portions and balance their meals with healthy foods. This participant reports "exercising regularly, eating well, watching his portions, and keeping healthy foods in the house" in his continued success. To help individuals maintain healthy eating habits, the TLC program shows correct portion sizes compared with everyday objects, such as a hockey puck or a deck of cards.

This participant really has appreciated the ongoing coaching calls, stating "you don't have to prove anything to anyone. It's better because you can be honest." He is enjoying being "more productive during the day because [he has] a good night's rest and [being] less depressed."

3. Thirty-six pounds. That's how much one participant – starting out at 585 pounds – lost in just a handful of weeks enroll in the TLC program. His BMI decreased from 81.6 to 76.6, and he's continuing to be motivated to see even more results.

The participant said he has tried many programs in the past, but the ability to talk one-on-one with someone over the phone really has worked best. Because of his size, he isn't easily able to leave the house and even avoids it in the winter, for fear of falling on ice and snow.

He also said he is unable to fit into the door of the medical offices at his VA. This is another example of how the phone-based program makes it more convenient for participants to receive support.

As part of the TLC program, he is using the Healthy Plate method, a diagram that allows participants to measure their intake of various food groups against the ideal, and he is working on eating regular meals with appreciate meal timing. He is finding additional support at home with the help of his wife, who has been encouraging him as well.

TLC By The Numbers

To date, TLC has had **23,727** contacts with Veterans. The program has received **8,228** consults and **4,785** Veterans have enrolled in the program. **1,250** Veterans have completed their final coaching call. **96%** of Veterans surveyed reported being satisfied with the program.

30% of survey respondents increased the rating of their current overall health

37% of survey respondents improved their time spent exercising

43% of survey respondents have quit using tobacco

27% of survey respondents have lost 5% or more of their body weight

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