

**Detection, Advice, Referral to Services (DARTS)
Among Clients Needing Legal Assistance**

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Specific Aims : In order to meet the health needs of vulnerable populations who bear an excessive burden of disease, partnerships outside traditional specialty care settings are paramount. This proposal seeks to improve access to health and social services among vulnerable populations by training Public Defenders (PDs) to identify clients with substance abuse or dependence and link them to appropriate substance abuse, health, and social services. The specific aims of this proposed study are to: (1) Assess a sample of Pennsylvania PDs about their knowledge, attitudes and current practices related to referring substance abusing clients to appropriate services; (2) Develop a standardized protocol for PDs to detect, advise, and refer substance abusing offenders to necessary services (DARTS); and (3) Pilot this protocol with a sample of PDs in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania with their low-income clients.

Background: Substance abuse is a serious health problem that strains the healthcare system and burdens the economy. Substance abuse and dependence is a leading cause of death and serious physical injuries, acute and chronic health problems, and a host of other impairments affecting individuals' vocational, social, emotional, and familial well-being. Yet despite the prevalence of substance abuse and the severe consequences of it, few individuals who could benefit from treatment and related services actually receive them. This may be particularly true for minorities. Minorities typically have less access to health and mental health services. However, they are over-represented in the criminal justice system and are more likely to be represented by PDs rather than private counsel. Training PDs to screen and refer their clients may facilitate linkage to health and social services among this vulnerable population.

A variety of empirically based substance abuse screening and referral procedures have been developed to increase access to treatment and services. However, the implementation of these protocols has primarily occurred in primary care offices and trauma centers. These settings provide a unique opportunity to make such referrals because they allow clients to speak freely and confidentially to professionals when they may be more motivated to change detrimental patterns of behavior. For example a patient who just survived an auto accident, or was just diagnosed with a drug-related medical condition, may be more open to discussing the effects of substance abuse and more likely to follow through with treatment referrals.

Another potentially ideal occasion for offering advice and making referrals is during the meeting between a criminal offender and PD shortly following an arrest. Similar to meetings with medical professionals in emergency rooms and trauma centers, confidential meetings between recent arrestees and their PDs may also provide a uniquely “teachable moment” where clients might be more receptive to advice and treatment referrals. However, in contrast to emergency rooms and trauma centers, referrals from PDs and other attorneys are still quite rare.

One exception to this is Drug and other diversion courts. These courts, which provide non-violent substance-abusing offenders with treatment and monitoring in lieu of incarceration, have been successful in linking offenders with necessary services. However, these courts only deal with offenders who are charged with drug or alcohol-related offenses and therefore cannot meet the needs of drug-involved offenders arrested for non-drug related offenses.

Design: The design of the study is three-fold and includes survey, protocol development, and intervention components.

Phase 1: Public Defender Survey: In the first phase of the study, we will survey a random sample of public defenders (N=50) in Pennsylvania to assess (1) attitudes towards substance abusing clients and substance abuse treatment; (2) perceived need for treatment among clientele; (3) current practices with substance abusing clients; (4) willingness to engage in a screening and referral protocol; and (5) perceived obstacles to implementing the DART. The survey will also gauge interest in participating in a semi-structured interview with the Principal Investigator. Participants who agree to be contacted and provide consent to participate in a phone or in-person interview will be asked detailed questions about perceived obstacles and recommendations for implementing a screening and referral protocol within Montgomery County.

Phase 2: DARTS Protocol Development: The protocol used in this study will be based on screening and brief intervention guidelines developed by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) for use with primary care and mental health clinicians. However, it will be tailored to the skills and needs of PDs and the range of treatment options available within Montgomery County identified during Phase 1. Components of this protocol will include questions for screening, a decision tree on for providing advice, and an electronic resource guide listing hundreds of free and low-costs services in Montgomery and surrounding counties. Advice offered will include feedback about the client’s substance use, a listing of resources available to clients who wish to receive further assessment and/or treatment, and counseling about how seeking treatment may influence their current legal standing.

Phase 3: Intervention Feasibility: PDs who consent to participate in the pilot protocol will attend a 3-hour training covering the prevalence and consequences of alcohol abuse, a review of the current state of substance abuse treatment research, and protocol screening and intervention procedures. Participating public defenders will receive continuing lawyer education units as well as all requisite materials and resources. They

will participate in a baseline and 3 month follow-up questionnaire to assess: (1) attitudes towards substance abuse and substance abuse treatment; (2) perceived need for treatment among clientele; (3) current practices with substance abusing clients; and (4) actual obstacles to implementing the protocol among their clients. The baseline and follow-up questionnaire will be patterned after the survey used to assess acceptability of screening and referral among public defenders statewide in Phase 1.

Summary: The overarching goal of this study is to broaden the base of health and social services to include vulnerable populations who might otherwise not receive appropriate services by educating PDs who work with them about how to detect substance abuse problems and refer clients to needed services. We hope that PDs who are trained to use this protocol will be more apt to ask their clients questions about the nature and extent of their substance abuse and feel comfortable and confident providing advice and making referrals to their clients. We also hope that this line of research will be expanded to determine whether this sort of intervention translates into a greater number of services being received by clients with PDs and better outcomes for individuals with health, mental health and other needs within the criminal justice system. Finally we also hope that this project will serve as a model for the innovative integration of criminal justice and traditional and specialty care health settings.