

We chose the right partner to revive our behavioral health program.

“Engaging Diamond to manage our behavioral health program was the right decision. They helped us restructure our inpatient and outpatients services, including our intensive outpatient program.”

- Bob LaGesse

Senior Vice President
Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital

Challenge

As one of Georgia’s largest comprehensive medical centers, Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital takes pride in the comprehensive health care services it provides to the residents of Albany and surrounding communities. Its behavioral health program had grown to include inpatient and outpatient services. But when the hospital lost two of its three psychiatrists, some hard operational decisions had to be made. They closed the inpatient unit while the outpatient program continued to operate with one physician. Hospital officials knew that the community depended on it for behavioral health care as demand for services continued to increase.

Solution

Phoebe Putney leadership charged three members of the management team, Dr. Doug Patten, senior vice president of Medical Affairs, Laura Shearer, senior vice president/chief nursing officer, and Bob LaGesse, senior vice president of Physician Practices with turning the behavioral health program around.

“Our initial reaction was to find a director, preferably a physician, who could regain control of the situation and rebuild the program,” says LaGesse. “We spent three months pursuing that option, couldn’t find the right person to fill the position, and realized we needed a different approach.”

Prior to this situation, hospital officials had engaged Diamond to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the behavioral health program. LaGesse says Diamond’s status as a Novation supplier was a key factor in choosing the group for the Phoebe assessment. Upon completion of the assessment, LaGesse, the chief nursing officer and the chief medical officer sat down with Diamond to review the findings. During the meeting, discussion turned to Diamond and Phoebe Putney entering into a management agreement. Diamond submitted a proposal for fully managing the behavioral health program. The proposal provided the basis for an agreement to which Phoebe’s three member team quickly signed off.

Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital Albany, Ga.

Established in 1911, Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital is a 443-bed teaching facility and a regional center for cancer and cardiac medicine. The Phoebe Heart Center performs more open-heart and cardiac catheterization procedures than all other hospitals in the region combined. Phoebe is the region’s only provider of neonatal intensive care, cardiovascular surgery and radiation oncology services. The more than 300 affiliated physicians and 3,800 professional staff form a unique partnership to deliver world-class healing and prevention to its community.

“Engaging Diamond to manage our behavioral health program was the right decision,” explains LaGessee. “The program was not meeting its goals of providing a viable inpatient and outpatient behavioral health program for our service area. In addition, we had less experience with the financial side of behavioral health care than did Diamond. They helped us re-evaluate our fees and our fee structures with payers. They guided us in the redesign of the inpatient and outpatient units so they are more state-of-the-art. They helped us restructure our inpatient and outpatients services, including our intensive outpatient program.”

Immediately upon signing the management contract, Diamond deployed an interim team of behavioral health specialists. LaGessee says this was a critical step that enabled Diamond to make immediate improvements and needed changes. Today, Diamond employs the management team and the hospital employs all other staff and physicians.

LaGessee says recruiting physicians remains a challenge. “One of the things we had hoped to get from the relationship with Diamond was better

sourcing of psychiatrists. What we discovered is that they have the same challenges recruiting physicians. So, we’ve joined with them in retained searches. Currently, we have three physicians staffing behavioral health, including locum tenens physicians. We need at least two more psychiatrists to be able to offer the services Phoebe envisions for our community.”

Attracting additional physicians to Phoebe Putney also is directly related to expanding behavioral health services to its other hospitals. Diamond staff is currently serving the flagship hospital as well as a rural critical access hospital. Plans are underway to place staff in other facilities to expand the service reach.

Results

By redesigning patient care areas and inpatient and outpatient programs, Phoebe’s behavioral health program has improved the quality and quantity of its services to its patients. LaGessee says the financial viability of the programs has improved due in part to revised payer contracts and to increased productivity of staff. With Diamond, the behavioral health programs currently operate with about 10 fewer FTEs.



Founded in 1985, Diamond Healthcare Corporation is the national leader in the planning, development and operation of high-quality behavioral health services in partnership with health care organizations. Diamond offers a comprehensive range of health care services, including behavioral health services; child, adolescent, adult and geriatric psychiatric services; sleep and pulmonary services; and employee assistance programs.

For more information, please contact VHA at 800.437.3293 or vhacustomerservice@vha.com.

