

County officials working on health care advances

by Rick Nelson

Wahkiakum County officials are taking part in the reorganization of health services.

Suzanne Holmes represents the county in the formation of the Great Rivers Behavior Health Organization (GRBHO), a new state mandated organization that is combining and replacing regional support networks, which have channeled state mental health programs to local services for a decade.

The organization has established a steering committee, which includes Wahkiakum Mental Health Director Chris Holmes (no relation to Suzanne Holmes) as a member, adopted an interim budget, started the process for selecting a recruitment firm and taken other steps to get the organization running.

The organization will start interviewing candidates for various jobs, including executive director, in January.

Meanwhile, county Health and Human Services Director Sue Cameron has been participating in the formation of Cascade Pacific Action Alliance, which supports health care programs across western Washington, focusing on the social determinants of health, clinical-community linkages, and whole person care.

Cameron said the organization has set three priorities:

1. Prevention and mitigation of adverse childhood experiences through home visiting and educating across the region.

2. Improving provider access capacity by establishing a seven-county telemedicine network, developing a nurse-practitioner residency program network and developing a regional recruitment plan to increase the number of providers in the region.

3. Improving health care integration and coordination. Wahkiakum County will be the location of a pilot project for expanded screening for children with behavioral health needs. The alliance will also develop and expand jail and fine alternatives and transitional services from jail to health care.

"I'm really pleased with this list," Cameron commented. "It's really hard to get seven counties to agree on anything."

Commissioners and the professionals discussed the movements and trends and identified issues they feel need to be addressed.

Commissioner Dan Cothren said parents can get lost as a child enters into the health care system.

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"I think the system is broken in a way," he said.

"It won't work if people aren't willing to work outside the box," said Sandra Benbrook-Rieder, who is a member of the board of directors of the Cowlitz Family Health Clinic.

Chris Holmes agreed. "The hope is to get everybody around the table so people can deal with it," he said.