

Sneak Preview: How to Engage Your African American Clients in Treatment

Posted at: <http://attcniatx.blogspot.com/2016/02/sneak-preview-how-to-engage-your.html>

Sneak Preview: How to Engage Your African-American Clients in Treatment

Maureen Fitzgerald

Introduction

Mark Sanders, LCSW, CADAC, of [On the Mark Consulting](#), is an international speaker on addiction and mental health treatment. He's written several books, along with the recovery monograph, [Recovery Management](#).

Sanders presented a webinar as part of the [Great Lakes ATTC Behavioral Health](#) webinar series:

Counseling African Americans with Substance Use Disorder

Thursday, February 25, 2016

12:00-1:30pm CT (10:00am PT, 11:00am MT, 1:00pm ET)

You can view the recorded webinar on our website or click on the following link: [recorded webinar](#)

Interview

I caught up with Sanders recently to ask if he could give a sneak preview of his webinar, and here's what he told me:

"Helping clients recover is all about engagement," says Sanders. "Half the clients we serve will miss their second outpatient session." He describes himself as a "micro specialist" who encourages agencies to **take small steps** to make incremental gains--like getting clients to engage successfully from their second appointment to the third, and then the third to the fourth.

What's one of those small steps that anyone could try in their agency -- next week?

"Pay attention to your waiting room," says Sanders. "It tells a story about who is welcome in an agency."

Creating a **welcoming environment** that reflects patients' cultures and interests can have a big impact on client retention. As an example, he cites the agency that treated gang-involved Latino adolescents. The reading material available in waiting room included issues of *Martha Stewart Magazine*, *Oprah*, and *Good Housekeeping*.

Another agency that specialized in treating patients with substance use disorders who are also HIV-positive displayed posters about sexually transmitted diseases in its waiting room.

"When we asked clients what they liked least about this program, they said "the waiting room," says Sanders. "The STD posters made them feel less than welcome."

Sanders adds that people who have a history of experiencing oppression and discrimination may contact a treatment agency with their **antenna already up**. This makes that first contact vitally important, whether by phone or in person. "Just imagine how having a security guard at the entrance to your agency might impact the trust of an African American who has experienced police brutality."

A quick and easy way to assess your waiting room environment? A [NIATx walk-through](#).

"An agency could easily conduct a walk-through with an eye to addressing clients' cross-cultural issues," says Sanders.

Have you done a walk-through of your waiting area recently? What changes did you make to create a more welcoming environment for all the clients you serve?