HEALTHCARE NAVIGATION
SERVING THE NEEDS OF 3,215 COURT-INVOLVED WOMEN
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Dear NJ Reentry Corporation,

As the medical director of the NJ Reentry program for women, I am extremely pleased to report that the vision and goals of the program are not only being met, but also exceeded. Working in partnership with many committed individuals and centers, which include health care providers, addiction treatment centers, federally qualified health centers and community behavioral health clinics, etc. we are ensuring that there is a continuum of services for all women on reentry. Vital pieces of this reentry health care program are the Circles of Care, the nurse navigation system that insures seamless coordination of needed services, the partnership with pharmacies to ensure continuation of required medications, the organized referral system for those with acute and chronic needs, the rapid access to health insurance and 24/7 access to emergency help.

The most recent addition to the program is the reentry medical forms (in compliance with HIPPA) that are prepared by the women about to be released such that their care can continue upon reentry without any missing services. As well, the core health care team, including Constance Kusi and myself, meet with the women about to reenter their community at Edna Mahan Correctional facility for Women. This new addition to the program was commenced on March 3rd with a visit by Governor McGreevey, Constance and me. We are planning to utilize this one-on-one meeting on a monthly basis to insure that all women have their needs addressed before reentry such that individual plans can be instituted when required/requested.

As well, I’m also very happy to report that our program has been nationally recognized. In 2021, we were invited by the National Conference on Correctional Health Care to speak about our program. Our presentations included:


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Our programs also have been published in the peer-reviewed literature. Many others are being worked on at this time.


We also have been recognized nationally by the voice that we give to the women and their advocates through the Journal of Women and Criminal Justice. To date, two editions of the journal have been released.

Again, working with an exceptional team of individuals who care about the health and wellness of incarcerated/reentry women, I am looking forward to continuing to provide these services.

Sincerely,
Gloria Bachmann

Gloria Bachmann
Gloria A Bachmann, MD, MMS
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Associate Dean for Women’s Health
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Medical Director of the NJ Commission on Women’s Reentry

2,019,900 women are jailed in the U.S. each year

80% are mothers

one square = 1,000 women in jail
THE CHALLENGE: CONNECTING WOMEN TO QUALITY HEALTHCARE

The complex psychosocial as well as medical challenges faced by incarcerated women who are reentering their community cannot be underestimated. The New Jersey Reentry was founded with the mission of 1) removing barriers incarcerated women face upon their reentry and 2) providing them with the tools necessary to make post incarceration life healthy, productive, and meaningful.

As stated by Mahatma Gandhi “It is health that is real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver.” To this effect, NJ Reentry prioritizes the health of our clients, and due to the special needs of these women, The Women’s Project and our Healthcare Navigation was commenced.

The New Jersey Reentry Corporation’s Women’s Navigation Project ensures incarcerated women received the maximum medical, behavioral, and social support that each one needs as they traverse the reentry process.

The primary objectives are removing the multiple barriers to healthcare women face, connecting them with available resources, and assisting them navigate complex healthcare systems, thereby increasing wellness and that of their family.

And, most importantly, services provided through this program continue for as long as requested. When women are released from incarceration, often they are not prepared to address their health care needs in tandem with the many other obstacles that they are confronted; including, housing, food security, and outstanding legal concerns. Most do not have the tools to address serious health problems they faced prior, during, and post incarceration.

OF INMATES REPORTED ABUSE WERE VICTIMIZED THREE OR MORE TIMES

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They are overwhelmed with getting their lives back together; getting their identification cards reinstated, securing a job, obtaining housing and being able to provide for their families.

Many of these women keep reliving the past which is very traumatic for them. Through the reentry program, they are given a mouth piece via the nurse navigator to talk for them when they are reluctant to do so.

They also are given an advocate to help them navigate through the complex healthcare system so their often complex healthcare needs (and their children in many cases) can be addressed.

As Michelle Obama once said “communities, countries and ultimately the world are only as strong as the health of their women.” When the mother is unhealthy, obviously it affects the health of the entire family.

"Greater than half of the women serving sentences at Edna Mahan report having experienced two or more types of abuse prior to incarceration—emotional, physical, or sexual—while nearly a third report having experienced all three."

of those women reported having been diagnosed with a physical health condition that can be classified as “chronic,” such as asthma, diabetes, hepatitis, and HIV/AIDS
As clearly emphasized, NJ Reentry doesn’t only focus on helping the reentry population get medical care, but also helping them get their lives back together by helping them with many issues, such as employment. NJRC believes in supporting them holistically. To do this, the program targets the overall wellbeing of the women, including the many health issues these women often have.

Evidence shows that America’s prison population is substantially less healthy than the general population. They have higher rates of HIV infection, hepatitis infection, tuberculosis, chronic lung disease, musculoskeletal disorders, STDs than the non-incarcerated Americans.

There is also a higher prevalence of mental health issues. As reiterated by Grammatikopoulou, Lampropoulou, Milapidou, & Goulis, (2021), “imprisonment is associated with an increased incidence of mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, with coping mechanisms, including substance abuse, being frequently adopted.”

Studies show that a huge number of these women use addictive substances in dealing with life’s stressors thereby leading to substance abuse, addiction and sometimes overdose. In other words, the mental health of this population is also significantly compromised, which is why they are often dealing with mental health issues such as suicidal tendencies, extreme Anxiety and Depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Insomnia, and Post Incarceration Syndrome.

With all of the wellness issues the previously incarcerated women have on their reentry, it is imperative to connect these women with medical, psychiatric, behavioral, vision, dental, and obstetrical/gynecological services, etc., to ensure their overall wellness.
Having all these challenges in mind, the NJ Reentry Corporation, is working tirelessly in addressing these health related issues. As well, in order to address them appropriately, the social determinants of health must also be addressed.

Addressing social determinants of health is essential for improving the health and reducing longstanding disparities in health and health care for the reentry women.

Along with the delivery of optimal and easily accessible health care, the NJRC also provides employment, housing, vocational training, access to food, healthcare coverage and provider availability. Thus the NJRC strive to ensure that the multiple barriers to healthcare of this population are highly eradicated.

The NJRC also has partnered with different community based stakeholders including clinics, hospitals, federally qualified health centers, local health departments as well as faith-based organizations to offer various health screenings, medical, behavioral, psychiatric, dental and obstetric and gynecological evaluations and treatment to our female clients.

Another aspect of NJRC is the women’s navigation project, which assists reentry women in their navigation through the complex healthcare system by making healthcare providers readily available to them. The nurse navigator connects these vulnerable women to primary care providers for their routine primary care.

Women who would have never thought of seeing an ob/gyn are given the opportunity to see one. As gynecological care is paramount to a woman’s health, the nurse navigator assists these women in staying up-to-date with their obstetrical and gynecological preventative health screenings such as breast (mammography), ovarian, uterine, pelvic and cervical (Pap) cancer.
Evidence shows that seeing an obstetrical provider early in pregnancy does not only provide the women with opportunities for a positive birth and early postpartum experience but it is also an investment in the future of these vulnerable families (Grassley, Ward, & Shelton, 2019).

The danger of not seeing an obstetrical provider when a woman is pregnant cannot be overemphasized.

The Journal of Midwifery and Women’s health clearly outlines the importance of gynecological and obstetrical care in this population.

The incarcerated/reentry population records a substantially higher number of infant and maternal mortality than non-incarcerated citizens. (Journal of Midwifery & Women’s Health, 66(4), 548–554).

The nurse navigator is also helping these women see a dentist for routine dental evaluations which is very important as poor dental health is strongly linked to cardiovascular health.

Therefore, having poor dental health in these women increases their risk of heart problems and other cardiovascular related complications.

Their mental health is also not being overlooked. Regarding this, the nurse navigator makes sure that these women are seeing a mental health provider either a psychiatrist or a psychiatric nurse practitioner for periodic mental health evaluations, routine follow up and psychotherapy.

For the women battling with substance use and addiction, we’re able to help them get into addiction treatment facilities for medical detoxification, Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) or Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP).

Among those inmates nearing release from Edna Mahan, nearly 30% reported not having anyone to rely on in planning their post-release living arrangements.

Incarcerated women are disproportionately affected by health issues such as pelvic pain, which require specialty and sub-specialty care that can be difficult to obtain, as well as sexually transmitted infections, breast and gynecological cancers, and pregnancy-related complications.
The Francine A. LeFrak Wellness Center

New Jersey Reentry Corporation also prides itself with its state-of-the art wellness center, the Francine LeFrak Wellness Center, in Kearny, NJ, which provides medical, behavioral, and dental diagnostic screenings, other referrals, as well as nutrition and healthy lifestyle support for NJRC clients.

With the Francine LeFrak Wellness Center, the Nurse Navigator is able to provide both male and female clients access to patient-centered care and help reduce medical deserts among this population.

The main objective of The Women’s project is to increase optimal health and wellness for women and break down barriers to healthcare. The Nurse Navigator utilizes preventative measures by providing these women with health education, health promotion and screenings, again offered at the Francine LeFrak Wellness Center.

The women who come to this center receive screenings for preventative health such as severe hypertension, hyperlipidemia, diabetes, breast and cervical cancers, dental, nutritional or dietary consult as well as mental health. Rigorous implementation of these preventative measures aids with early diagnosis, appropriate intervention and treatment options which definitely keep these women out of the hospital and of course maintain their optimal health.
Circle of Care Initiative

As part of health promotion and health education exercise, New Jersey Reentry Corporation offers group-based discussions and activities through the “Circle of Care initiative.”

This platform serves as a support group for the women by empowering them to speak with other women, give and receive information on how to better care for themselves and also how to rebuild their self-esteem. Through this initiative, the women are provided with information they need to better navigate through the complex healthcare system.

Topics including staying safe in terms of Intimate Partner Violence, vaccine hesitancy and its consequences, pre-conceptual care, prenatal as well as postnatal care, smoking cessation and alcohol abstinence also discussed as well as the long-term implications of their use and how they can negatively impact the neonatal health and wellness that can result in Neonatal abstinence syndrome as well as Fetal alcohol syndrome.

Speakers at these meetings are usually phenomenal clinicians, professional counselors, and other experts who provide routine guidance and support to these women. This medium definitely serves as a platform for the women to pour out their hearts and share their stories.

At these meetings, the Nurse Navigator also distributes feminine hygiene products to our women As Maya Angelou once emphasized, “there is no agony like bearing an untold story inside of you.”

The meetings are hosted for all female clients enrolled at Essex/Hudson counties, Bergen, Passaic counties, Middlesex county and Ocean, Monmouth counties.

Among 908 incarcerated women surveyed in a study at Edna Mahan, 427 (nearly half) reported feeling as if they needed mental health and/or substance use treatment during the period of their incarceration.
In summary, the Nurse Navigator, consistently contacts the women for routine health-need assessments either virtually or in-person at various NJRC sites.

This assessment is conducted through the utilization of the health intake forms distributed to all women upon enrollment. This keeps the NJRC medical team adequately informed about the health history as well as the overall health needs of each individual and tailor referrals to that individual, including case management referrals for housing, legal, and employment training.

For women returning from prison, fear, depression, and anxiety can be omnipresent due to concerns regarding medical and behavioral healthcare, the lack of affordable housing, financial resources, and family reunification.

Early intervention is key to better health outcomes and therefore reentry commences before the women leave prison. The medical team embarks on routine in-prison visits to speak to the women in the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women on a monthly basis.

The women are provided with health education, how to navigate their own health care needs and the necessity of maintaining their healthcare.
TESTIMONIALS:
FROM BENEFICIARIES OF THE
WOMEN NAVIGATION PROJECT

My name is Yalanda Thompson. I would like to thank New Jersey Reentry for their support and for introducing me to Ms. Constance. Before I came to Reentry, I knew something was wrong with me, I couldn’t sleep at night and I had bad anxiety. I tried seeing a psychiatrist but I was struggling to get an immediate appointment. The earliest appointment I could get was in 5 months. The first day I met Ms. Constance at New Jersey Reentry in Elizabeth, she did my assessment and referred me to a psychiatrist, she helped me make the appointment and I got to see the doctor the following week, which was so amazing! Now I have been prescribed medications which are helping me sleep a lot better and manage my anxiety. She also introduced me to this discussion group called Circle of Care. I love those meetings on Tuesdays! In fact, she provided me with the help I have been searching for and needed. Thank you!

Yalanda Thompson, 56 y/o, Elizabeth, NJ

My name is Janesha, I recently came to New Jersey Reentry to help me get my life back on track. The Clinician saw me the next day and sat down with me in an office to do my evaluation. She was so nice to me. I thought I knew everything about my health but together we went over my health history and she provided me with so much information that I didn’t even know about myself and my health. She insisted I see an ObGyn because of my medical history but since I didn’t have medical insurance, she asked the social worker to help me get one. She also introduced me to the women’s meeting called Circle of Care. These meetings are so good. The speakers are so exceptional and they answer all my questions. Thank you Ms. Constance. Thank you New Jersey Reentry for all the help!

Janesha Davis, 24 y/o, Newark, NJ

Formerly incarcerated women ... are more likely to experience homelessness upon or shortly after release than their male counterparts, and formerly incarcerated Black and Hispanic women experience homelessness at a higher rates.
I entered New Jersey Reentry with a need for housing, medicaid, and employment. The resume and expungement workshops helped me greatly. I was able to get Welfare and find a housing situation.”

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When I entered NJ Reentry, I applied to anything I could. I was able to apply for housing, SNAP, and Medicaid. Alan helped me tremendously with my resume and I was able to find a job.”

NJ Reentry helped me with my license, SNAP, and Medicaid. The employment workshops allowed me to get my foot in the door with different companies willing to hire me and am excited to start working.
“My name is Danielle Hawkins and I just wanted to thank Ms Constance for everything. I met this woman just a week ago and I would give her 5 stars. She sat me down and discussed my health. Her advice to me was so genuine and caring. She gave me a lot of pointers and coping skills to help me go about my daily life. I am also a quiet person and I found the Circle of Care group meeting to be very helpful because it allows me to open up and talk. Ms Dawn the counselor is also very helpful. Currently Ms Constance is helping me with getting doctors appointments and I cannot thank her enough.

I am Marisol. I am in the halfway house and someone told me about New Jersey Reentry. The staff and everybody in the building is just amazing but I would want to specifically thank Constance, the Nurse for everything she did for me when I met with her. She spent so much time on me and answered all my health questions. She ensured I have an appointment to see a gynecologist and a dentist. She told me about the Women’s group and provided me with the zoom link. She never gives up on you. She called me that evening around 7pm reminding me to join and I did. That meeting is life changing.

References


