Waiting Room Environment Policy and Procedure for Accommodating Persons with Mental Health Conditions

Efforts should be made to avoid florescent lighting, which increases the institutional feel of a clinic, and decreases feelings of emotional warmth. In addition, florescent lighting has been shown to increase stress, migraines and anxiety.

Screening tools that include mental health symptoms, if administered in the waiting room, should be given universally so those with mental health conditions do not feel singled out. Aside from identifying individuals for whom mental health interventions are indicated, mental health screening has the secondary benefit of showing clients that the organization wants to hear and know about psychological difficulties, increasing the probability that those with these conditions will feel welcome.

If clients are having visible symptoms, such as talking to themselves, talking to other clients about delusional content, anxiously pacing, etc. a staff member should go up them and quietly offer a private area for them to wait. This is done for the clients’ comfort as well as others. If space does not allow for a separate private area, other options include having the clients wait in an empty exam room, an empty office or, if the client’s condition warrants, in an office with a staff member. If clients are comfortable waiting outside, that can be an option also. Receptionists can let the team know where the client will be when it is time for their appointment.

Clients should be informed when they come in that they can ask for alternative waiting options.

Clients should be informed when they check in of the estimated wait time, and periodic updates should be given.

Water should be available or offered to clients when they check in.

Staff members should regularly visit the waiting room to tidy up, interact with clients warmly, offer parents crayons and papers for children, etc. This sense of attending/befriending clients in the waiting room not only decreases the chance of behavioral escalations, it provides a comforting presence for all who have come for care.