

## Grant will help Gulf Bend buy high-tech equipment

New equipment to aid caregivers in helping patients

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BY GABE SEMENZA - VICTORIA ADVOCATE

By moving deeper into the digital age, a local mental health center hopes to offer patients cheaper treatment and better access to it.

Gulf Bend Mental Health and Mental Retardation received a \$98,600 grant from The Meadows Foundation, a Dallas-based philanthropic group that works to improve quality of life across Texas.

The grant will buy Gulf Bend high-tech equipment and technological upgrades, which the center hopes will increase access to mental health services for people with serious and persistent mental illness - a group that's often uninsured and living in remote areas near Victoria.

The new equipment - which includes personal digital assistants (PDA), laptops and tele-video stations - could help caregivers to efficiently deliver treatment to these patients.

"We don't have freestanding clinics out in the region and we cover about 8,000 square miles in serving the Crossroads," said Don Polzin, Gulf Bend's executive director.

With PDAs, or handheld computers, mental health case workers will be able to electronically carry a patient's medical record into the field, update it and then upload that data into Gulf Bend's server. New laptops will offer similar conveniences.

And for about \$8,000 apiece, Gulf Bend is purchasing five new tele-video stations, which allow staff psychiatrists to treat patients remotely using closed circuit TV feeds. Instead of traveling to a Port Lavaca hospital or jail, for instance, a Gulf Bend psychiatrist would need only to walk down the hall.

Jessica Grutzmacher, the center's marketing coordinator, said many regional patients don't have transportation. They can't drive to Gulf Bend, which is in Victoria.

"With the tele-video equipment, they'll just go to a nearby tele-video center," she said. "Basically it will allow for more face-to-face time."

For Gulf Bend, the technology will save time and money, and is expected to increase profits and parlay into decreased costs to patients.

This technology will also improve security, Polzin said. The digital data is encrypted, which he said decreases the chance sensitive health information is lost or stolen.

And fewer inmates, who are sometimes dangerous, will be transported from jails to the center for treatment.

Polzin also said that it's difficult to recruit mental health care givers to Victoria. Tele-video stations will afford the center the option to hire an outside psychiatrist, and deliver his distant services locally using the tele-video stations.

David Way, the center's director of operations, said Gulf Bend plans to implement this technology project by the end of

## September.

Areas considered "high-traffic" locations are being considered for spots to locate the tele-video stations.

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