It was January of 2015 when Allison Schmitt hit rock bottom — not that you could guess by looking at her. At just 24 years old, Schmitt was already a two-time Olympian with six medals under her belt including a gold medal performance in the 200-meter freestyle.

But Schmitt had fallen into a depression following the 2012 Summer Games. After the interviews and celebrations had ended, Schmitt returned to the University of Georgia to continue her collegiate swimming career. Over time, she became increasingly withdrawn, missing classes and practices, and her swimming performances began to fall off. At her lowest point, as she drove to watch her sister play hockey, Schmitt thought of driving off the road and ending her life.

“There are a number of risk factors for mental health issues that are unique to athletes, especially those performing at the highest levels,” said Carrie Pichie, PhD, Director of Ambulatory Services at Natchaug Hospital, a Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health Network partner. “The intense training and high pressure environment can lead to burnout or social isolation. Their failures, and even successes, are magnified and over time that can impact sense of self and lead to issues like depression and anxiety.”

Eventually, those around Schmitt began to notice the changes in her personality — including her training partner and mentor Michael Phelps, who was fresh out of rehab after a second drunk driving arrest. When Schmitt broke down at a swim meet, Phelps and her training coaches pulled her aside and convinced her to seek treatment. She reluctantly began meeting with a psychologist, but stopped shortly after, partially from feeling ashamed.

“Athletes are associated with strength and perseverance, and they internalize that view,” Pichie said.

U.S. Olympic swimmer Allison Schmitt has won multiple medals in the pool, but training at such a high level for so long can lead to burnout or isolation out of it.
Cousin’s death pushed Schmitt to seek help

continued from page 1

said. “They may be less likely to seek treatment because of stigma and concerns over being seen as ‘weak’ or ‘giving up.’”

The true wake-up call came for Schmitt a few months later. On May 5, 2015, Schmitt’s cousin April Bocian took her own life just a week after her 17th birthday. Bocian, like Schmitt, was a stand-out athlete who had been recruited by Division I basketball teams starting her sophomore year.

After Bocian’s death, Schmitt’s outlook on her own depression changed. A few weeks later, she opened up about her struggles in interviews with The Associated Press and The Baltimore Sun. She called for post-Olympic mental health support at a USA Swimming award dinner and shared her story at a Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) leadership conference.

“It’s so powerful when athletes speak out about their struggles,” Pichie said. “They’re in the public eye and role models for so many. It shows people that fighting depression or other issues doesn’t signify weakness, it signifies strength.”

At the 2016 United States Olympic Trials, Schmitt qualified for her third Olympics and was named one of the captains of the U.S. swim team. Just this week, she swam on both the 4x100- and 4x200-meter freestyle relays to earn her seventh and eighth medals.

“Me as a 17-year-old, me as an 18-year-old, me as a 20-year-old, didn’t know how precious life is,” said Schmitt during her speech at the MHSAA leadership conference. “I thought I was invincible... We always need some help. I’m still asking for help. I still have to go see a psychologist. If any outsider sees me, they think life’s perfect... But if you look at it, everybody’s got their own struggles.”

Anything to share?

Are you interested in sharing your clinical experience or knowledge with colleagues throughout the HHC Behavioral Health Network? Consider submitting an article to the Clinical Corner. For more information, e-mail amanda.nappi@hhchealth.org or matt.burgard@hhchealth.org.

About BHNews

BHNews is published every other Friday. Story ideas or submissions may be sent to matt.burgard@hhchealth.org or amanda.nappi@hhchealth.org. Articles must be submitted as a Word document. Every effort will be made to run the article in its entirety, but due to space constraints and style guidelines, editing may be necessary.

Deadline for the next edition of BHNews is Tuesday, Aug. 23, at noon.

What’s your ‘best practice?’

As Hartford HealthCare mobilizes to improve our patient/customer experience, we know that great things are already happening in our offices, on our units and in our patient rooms every day.

The next step is to make sure that these “best practices” are shared across the system so that we can create one exceptional experience at every location that is part of HHC.

The HHC Patient Experience Council would like to hear about what you are already doing and what new ideas you have to improve patient experience. Please help us to spread our best practices by submitting yours for review.

Your submission should explain what you are doing and how it has had a measurable impact on improving patient experience. All submissions should explain how the practice relates to least one of the HHC 2016 Experience focus areas — Service, Communication and Environment.

The council, comprised of leaders across the system, will evaluate every entry. The best of the best will be celebrated at our next patient experience event and the implementation of the practice will be encouraged system-wide.

If you would like to submit a best practice for consideration please visit our Patient & Customer Experience page on HHC Connect to find answers to your frequently asked questions (FAQs) and an electronic submission form.

If you have questions, please contact one of HHC’s Strategic Experience Advisors.
H3W leadership training hits big milestone

Hartford Healthcare’s H3W journey has reached a major milestone. During an H3W (How Hartford HealthCare Works) Leadership Behavior Training Session on Aug. 9, the system surpassed 18,000 employees who have received the training. The number—which represents the approximate number of HHC employees — was set as a balance scorecard goal when H3W was launched across the system more than five years ago.

“We started this journey about five and half years ago with the notion of bringing out these 10 leadership behaviors which have become such an essential part of the work we do and the work that is in front of us. I am so proud of all of you, of all of our facilitators, and all of our 18,000 staff who represent the great work that gets done in our organization,” said Elliot Joseph, President and Chief Executive Officer who, along with several other members of HHC executive leadership team, made a surprise visit to help kick off the session at the Hartford HealthCare System Support Office at 11 Stott Ave. in Norwich.

Jenna Hannelius, a Human Resources Business Partner from Natchaug, participated in the milestone training session.

“I really appreciate the support of this program from top management. I didn’t realize that I would be part of the class that celebrated the milestone of 18,000 trained employees. That’s a great accomplishment.”

— Jenna Hannelius, Human Resources Business Partner, Natchaug

H3W as we know it today was launched at Hartford Hospital in 2009 based on a model with origins at Mid-State Hospital 20 years ago. Since then H3W has been deployed system-wide, with a strong emphasis on staff engagement, accountability, data collection and analysis, organizational communication, as well as recognition and celebration. Employees across the organization have been trained in our H3W Leadership Behaviors designed to create a common, culture of respect, accountability, high performance and honesty.

“This is a huge organizational milestone,” said Tracy Church, Senior Vice President, and Chief Human Resource Officer. “H3W allows us to put words into action. We now have a network of 18,000 strong and growing [who have received H3W leadership training]. We have the tools, training and skill-building to be better partners and to be able to deliver the best care and utmost experience to our patients, their families and our communities.”

Grant allows for expansion of primary care project

Hartford HealthCare’s Primary Care-Behavioral Health (PCBH) integration project will be expanding to primary care practices in downtown Hartford, New Britain and Willimantic with the support of $100,000 in grant funding from the Connecticut Health Foundation.

The PCBH pilot project — a collaboration between HHC’s Integrated Care Partners and the Behavioral Health Network — began embedding behavioral health clinicians into primary care practices to provide consultation, assist with diagnosis and assessment, conduct treatment and facilitate referrals to other providers.

With the grant funding from the Connecticut Health Foundation, Hartford HealthCare will look to duplicate the success of the PCBH in communities with larger minority populations.

“Accessing mental health resources is challenging, and we know that minority populations face even more barriers and obstacles,” said James O’Dea, PhD, MBA, Vice President of Operations for the Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health Network.

Since its inception in 2015, the PCBH project has been a tremendous success. Patients referred to the on-site behavioral health clinician were significantly more likely to attend their first visit (80 percent attendance as compared with 30 percent attendance for traditional referrals). A reduction in emergency department utilization and inpatient admissions was also observed among patients who were referred to the embedded clinician.

“We know this model works in Colchester and West Hartford,” O’Dea said. “Now we want to show the same kind of outcomes or even better outcomes in communities with a more diverse population.”

Clinicians will be embedded into the new primary care locations starting in fiscal year 2017.
The Story

What you need to know about the BHN’s new one-year partnership with WNPR

Title

Behavioral Health Network sponsorship of WNPR Opioid Addiction Crisis Reporting Initiative.

Focus

Like the rest of the nation, Connecticut is in midst of a crisis as heroin and other opioids are having unprecedented impacts on residents in our state — from the inner cities to the suburbs, old and young, rich and poor. The issue is complicated, and WNPR is planning a series of in-depth stories on the issue. The Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health Network has been at the forefront of the issue, with its MATCH (Medication Assisted Treatment Close to Home) expansion; education program for hundreds of Hartford HealthCare physicians focusing on best practices and guidelines for prescribing; promotion of the use of Narcan; community forums; media experts and specially trained staff. Together, WNPR and the HHC BHN will be able to shine a spotlight not just on the problem, but also offer solutions and hope for recovery. Being part of this reporting initiative will bring even more attention to the HHC BHN, MATCH and other behavioral health services.

Platforms

The stories that have been done so far can be found on the WNPR.org website, or specifically at http://wnpr.org/wnpr-covers-connecticuts-opioid-epidemic. The Behavioral Health Network’s logo is at the top of the page, as is an ad for the MATCH program. In addition, at the end of each story the Behavioral Health Network’s support of this reporting initiative will be read on the air and listed at the bottom of the story on the website. In addition:

- There will be 36 reports with the HHC BHN Network identified as the sponsor.
- 30 promos of the BHN each month, or 360 promos over the course of the one-year partnership.
- Mentions of the BHN leading in to four Where We Live shows.
- Mentions of HHC BHN on a minimum of 36 WNPR web pages
- 240 marketing spots airing during the morning and evening drive times
- Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health Network will be mentioned before, during and after The Concert to Face Addiction, which will air on CPTV on Saturday, Oct. 22 and again on Oct. 28.

Audience

Those who are addicted to opioids and seeking help, as well as friends, family and loved ones who want to seek help for someone.

Five key points

1. The BHN is a statewide leader in helping to solve the opioid crisis in Connecticut and beyond.

2. The BHN has the experts in this field.

3. MATCH is a key component of treating this issue, and the BHN continues to expand in order to improve access to these programs.

4. Partnering with WNPR creates a halo effect for the BHN and helps build trust.

5. Despite the magnitude of the problem, there is hope for recovery.
Ready for back to school

Institute of Living employees helped numerous families across the greater Hartford region get prepared for the upcoming school year at the annual Back to School Resource Fair, providing dozens of free backpacks and other school supplies. The fair took place Aug. 10 at the IOL, and numerous employees manned tables and helped coordinate along with other community-based organizations.

IOL, Natchaug make transformation to Epic electronic records

On Aug. 20, the Behavioral Health Network takes its first step towards the future of medical health records as programs at the Institute of Living and Natchaug Hospital go live with Epic, the new system-wide electronic health record system.

The initial roll out will take place on the inpatient units and electroconvulsive therapy program at the IOL and the inpatient units at Natchaug Hospital.

The transition to the Epic platform creates a single electronic medical record for patients that can be reviewed and updated by any provider in Hartford HealthCare or at other Epic institutions across the country.

"From a client's perspective, it means that no matter where you go across the healthcare system, your history and story follows you," said Gale Sullivan, MSN, RN-BC, Regional Director of Nursing for the Behavioral Health Network East Region. "The end result is major improvements in patient experience and safety."

Epic eliminates the need for multiple medical charts and redundant paperwork as patients navigate the health care system; and by giving providers easy access to medical history and records, the likelihood of repetitive medical tests and medication errors is greatly reduced.

"With Epic, we’re going to be able to coordinate care much more effectively, especially between the acute care facilities and the BHN," said Annetta Caplinger, Vice President of Clinical Operations at the Institute of Living. "Right now clinical staff work between two or three systems, so access to a single medical record is something that we are really looking forward to."

Hartford HealthCare Medical Group, Hartford Hospital, MidState Medical Center and Windham Hospital also went live during fiscal year 2016. Plans are in the works to roll out Epic at all Hartford HealthCare institutions over the next couple years.

Reminder: All Clinical Staff

Issues of Suicide Support Group

Last Tuesday of Every Month
Date: Last Tuesday of Every Month
Time: noon – 1 p.m.
Place: Family Resource Center
       Massachusetts Cottage
       Group Room - 1st Floor

Offering the opportunity for discussion with clinical staff who have experienced issues related to suicide in their work.

Facilitator: Nancy E. Hubbard, LCSW

Light lunch will be provided
RSVP required to 860.545.7665

Institute of Living
A Division of Hartford Hospital
Family Resource Center Support Groups

The IOL Family Resource Center (FRC) holds regular support groups. For addition information, please contact the FRC at 860.545.7665 or 860.545.1888. All programs are free of charge and, unless otherwise noted, are held in the Massachusetts Cottage, First Floor Group Room at the IOL Campus, 200 Retreat Ave., Hartford. The upcoming IOL FRC Support Group schedule is as follows:

- **Support Group For Those Coping With A New Or Chronic Medical Condition.** Aug. 12, 19, 26 (Every Friday), 1 - 2 p.m. in the Center Building, First Floor Conference Room. For young adults ages 17-26 struggling with a new diagnosis, chronic medical conditions, physical symptoms or limitations. The group will help with difficult losses and limitation due to a medical condition, and build a positive, future-oriented focus with realistic goals. To RSVP, please call Elizabeth Alve-Hedegaard, APRN, at 860.545.7050.

- **Depression Bipolar Support Alliance Group (DBSA).** Aug. 15, 22, 29 (Every Monday), noon - 1 p.m. in the Todd Building, Bunker Room and Aug. 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 (Every Wednesday), 7 - 8 p.m. in the Commons Building, 2nd Floor, Litchfield Room. Peer run support group for those who have been diagnosed with depression or bipolar disorder.

- **Alcoholics Anonymous.** Aug. 16, 23, 30 (Every Tuesday), 12:30-1:30 p.m. Join us for coffee and a one-hour topic discussion. To learn more, contact the AA General Service Office at 212-870-3400 or P.O. Box 459, New York, NY 10163.

- **Bipolar: An Introduction To The Disorder.** Aug. 16, Oct. 18, Dec. 13, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. This program is for family members and friends of individuals who have bipolar or a related disorder. It will present a basic understanding of the disorder, its treatment, along with specific suggestions to help family members and friends better cope with the illness.

- **Support Group For Families Dealing With Major Mental Illness.** Aug. 18, Sept. 1, 15, Oct., 6, 20, Nov. 3, 17, Dec. 1, 15 (First and third Thursday of each month), 5:15 - 6:30 p.m. in the Center Building, First Floor Conference Room. For family and friends of individuals who have schizophrenia, bipolar or other related disorders. Share your success and struggles. Learn to care for yourself while caring for others.

- **Youth Psychosis Family Support Group.** Aug. 18, Sept. 1, 15, Oct., 6, 20, Nov. 3, 17, Dec. 1, 15 (First and third Thursday of each month), 5:15 - 6:30 p.m. in the Center Building, Young Adult Service Group Room. For parents with youth up to age 18 who have psychotic symptoms such as: hallucinations, delusions, paranoia, disorganized thoughts and behavior or are diagnosed with schizophrenia and other related disorders. Join us to receive support, guidance and education on how to help your young person.

- **Al-Anon Parent Group.** Aug. 18, 25 (Every Thursday), 7 - 8 p.m. One hour topic discussion.

- **Depression: An Introduction To The Disorder.** Aug. 23, Oct. 25, Dec. 6, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. This program is for family and friends of individuals who suffer from depression. It will present a basic understanding of major depression, its treatment, and ways in which family members might better cope with the illness.

- **Social Support Group — LGBTQ Issues (Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Questioning).** Aug. 24, Sept. 14, 28, Oct. 12, 26, Nov. 9, 23, Dec. 14, 28 (Second and fourth Wednesday of each month), 5 – 6:15 p.m. in the Center Building, Young Adult Service Group Room. Support group for 16- to 23-year-olds who identify LGBTQ issues as being prominent in their lives. The goal is to discuss support strategies to manage life challenges.

- **Dementia Support/Educational Group Meeting.** Sept. 6, Oct. 4, Nov. 1, Dec. 6 (First Tuesday of each month), 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the Donnelly Conference Room, First Floor. Please join us as we bring together experts and those who want guidance, direction, and support. Space is limited — reservations are required by calling 860.545.7665.

- **Managing Schizophrenia.** Sept. 6, 3 and 23, Oct. 8 and 22, Nov. 5, 19, Dec. 3 and 17, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. This presentation will discuss the impact that symptoms of schizophrenia have on everyday activities, and provide tips on what you can do to make things better at home.

- **Survivors Of Suicide Support Group.** Sept. 7, Oct. 5, Nov. 2, Dec. 7 (First Wednesday of the month), 7 – 8:15 p.m. For those who have lost someone close to them by suicide. Please call the RSVP numbers with questions or concerns. 860.545.7716 or 860.545.7665.

- **Substance Use Educational And Support Group.** Sept. 8, Oct. 13, Nov. 10, Dec. 8 (Second Thursday of each month), 4 – 5 p.m. For family members impacted by loved ones with substance abuse.

- **An Introduction To Mental Health Benefits and Services.** Sept. 20, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. This presentation will provide an overview of benefit programs available for individuals with mental health disabilities.
Natchaug Hospital 5K/10k Trail Run & Nature Walk

Saturday, September 10
Nipmuck Trail – East Branch

Registration Deadline:
Monday, August 22, 2016

Things to know:
☑ All donations stay local to Natchaug Hospital and its programs
☑ No donation goes towards wages or salaries
☑ All event proceeds benefit clients at Natchaug programs and services and are tax-deductible

For more information, contact Sherry Smardon, Sherry.Smardon@hhchealth.org or 860.465.5910, or visit www.natchaug.org/trailrun.

School supply drive at JCTV

Natchaug’s Joshua Center Thames Valley is holding its annual Back-to-School school supply drive to collect items to distribute to clients and families in-need. Suggestions for donations include:

- Pencils
- Crayons
- Notebooks
- Pens
- Markers
- Erasers
- Backpacks (new or gently used)
- School uniforms (new or gently used) sized for K-8. Blue collared shirts; navy or khaki pants/skirts

Collection boxes are located at the Natchaug main hospital lobby, JC Thames Valley and the East Region System Support Office (11 Stott Ave., Norwich), and items will be collected until Thursday, Aug. 25.

If you have any questions, contact JC Thames Valley program director Stephanie Bonardi at 860.823.5361 or stephanie.bonardi@hhchealth.org.

Icy treats

Clients and staff on the Natchaug Hospital inpatient units beat the summer heat with an icy snack, served by mental health worker Ben Nazario.
Connery celebrates 30th anniversary with Rushford

Lyn Connery, Rushford Prevention Professional, was honored for her 30th anniversary with Rushford. Connery was hired to serve as the Student Assistance Counselor to Westbrook High School in August 1986 and has served in the same role for her entire 30 years of service.

Lyn is highly valued for establishing trust and credibility with students, parents, and staff in Westbrook. She has provided guidance and support to countless students to assist them in making the most of their high school years, and has had many students remain in touch long into their adult lives.

Candygrams bring sweets and smiles to staff

Jazmin Suarez, an employee specialist at Rushford's Paddock Avenue location in Meriden, carries a candygram to deliver to a co-worker this week, part of an annual Friendship Day celebration honoring the strong relationships between staff.

In all, Jazmin and fellow candygram co-ordinator Sarah Kimball delivered 157 bags full of chocolate, lollipops and other sweets that were ordered last week by staff members to deliver to individual colleagues.

The candygrams cost $1 each, with all the sweets tied up with a ribbon in a treat bag. Each of the bags had notes attached to them to say who the candygram was from, but in some cases employees wished to remain anonymous and had the gift sent from a "Sweet-cret admirer.

Nurses continue to show off green thumbs

In what is becoming an annual tradition, Rushford third-shift nurses Bev Francolino and Elizabeth Vasileff continue to dazzle and delight staff and clients with their garden efforts at the Rushford location on Silver Street in Middletown this year.

Just over the bridge from the parking lot, the nurses have created a circular garden that provides a visual area, bringing serenity and focus to staff and clients as they enter and exit the facility. The vibrant colors of the many types of flowers are encircled by a newly added moat that adds eye-catching sparkle and shine, providing a welcoming feel to all that walk past.
Contestants sought for talent show

Come one, come all for the Rushford Clients Talent Show on Wednesday, Sept. 21, at 1 p.m. in the Rushford Cafeteria at Paddock Avenue in Meriden.

Rushford clients from Case Managers, Clinicians, Friendship Club, Young Adult Services, Kuhn Employment, Homeless Outreach, Crisis and other departments are all eligible.

If you know of a client who would like to participate, please let us know by calling Antoinette at 203.630.5353 or Lucille at 203.630.5240.