

THE DRUG WAR IN COBB

Taking steps toward recovery

Identify needs when choosing treatment path

By Linda C. Rehkopf
Staff writer

Cobb residents looking for substance-abuse treatment centers have plenty of options, from almost-free care through the health department to expensive private therapy in area hospitals.

Before plunking down money, patients or families are advised to compare programs at various centers, remaining mindful that in many cases the comparison will be between apples and oranges. Bed costs for inpatient care depend on many variables, such as the number and types of therapies included in the treatment. And insurance companies may or may not pay for all or part of substance-abuse treatment.

The cost for treatment in Cobb for a 28-day inpatient program for adults ranges from less than \$500 for the county's indigent (through the mental health department) to more than \$13,000 at one of the hospitals. Treatment at a private hospital is not necessarily more expensive than at public facilities. In addition, costs for children and teens may run considerably higher due to the length of treatment, which in some programs can be more than a year.

Most of the county's programs for adults and teenagers rely on the 12-step formula developed by Alcoholics Anonymous, and that is not by accident.

"We haven't come up with anything better than the 12-step program," said Mary Follo, lead nurse for the Cobb-Douglas Mental Health Center intervention program.

According to Dr. Thomas Douglass, director of Ridgeview Institute's Adult Chemical Dependence Program, the first few days of a 28-day inpatient treatment program usually are spent in detoxification to get the patient stabilized and off drugs. The length of detoxification varies depending on the drug used.

Also, most programs include assessments of the patient's physical, emotional, addiction and social histories. Family members may be asked to talk with a social worker.

"After a week, we have a grip on what we're dealing with," Dr. Douglass said.

After-care consists of two years of intense outpatient treatment, including Alcoholics Anonymous and/or Narcotics Anon-



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Drug and alcohol treatment centers in Cobb County area

Brawner Psychiatric Institute, 3180 Atlanta St., Smyrna. 436-0081.

Cobb/Douglas Mental Health Services locations:
260 Hawkins Store Road, Kennesaw. 928-1333.
6133 Love St., Austell. 739-3330. 2859 King St., Smyrna. 436-2488.

Cobb Hospital and Medical Center, 3950 Austell Road, Austell. 944-5660.

Kennestone Hospital, 677 Church St., Marietta. 428-2700

Kennestone at Windy Hill, 2540 Windy Hill Road, Marietta. 951-3130.

Parkway Medical Center, 1000 Thornton Road, Lithia Springs. 944-4141.

Ridgeview Institute, 3995 South Cobb Drive, Smyrna. 434-4567.

Smyrna Hospital, 3949 South Cobb Drive, Smyrna. 434-0710.

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by what the program offers. What you can do is lessen the intensity of the episodes, and lengthen the time between episodes."

■ **HCA Parkway Medical Center** in Lithia Springs, though not in Cobb, treats many west and south Cobb residents through its inpatient and outpatient programs for adolescents and adults. Parkway has a 20-bed adult substance-abuse unit and a 24-bed short-term program for adolescents suffering psychiatric and/or substance-abuse problems.

Administrators of the relatively new adult program do not keep statistics on recidivism, but said that more than 50 percent of

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Even with the support of the treatment staff, family and friends, the abuser stands a good chance of relapsing, particularly if life stresses are compounded.

"Unfortunately, it's a relapsing disease, but it doesn't have to be," Dr. Douglass said. "I emphasize the fact that only the survivors come back [for treatment]. Everybody doesn't get back alive."

Success rates of individual programs are hard to measure, and Dr. Douglass said that even the experts don't agree on how to collect and interpret information to measure success.

Dan Dougherty, director of Brawner Psychiatric Institute's recovery program for adults, said national statistics indicate that among those who maintain abstinence, get involved with AA and have families in treatment, fewer than 7 percent will resume active drug use.

For those who can't spare the money or the time for an inpatient regimen, most area hospitals also offer outpatient programs. But according to Mr. Dougherty, the partial hospitalization program "works for only about 60 percent of patients."

Cobb's indigent substance abusers face more hardships. Although the county's general hospitals provide beds for Medicare/Medicaid patients, for the most part, those with no money and no insurance are relegated to a state facility or to the Cobb/Douglas Mental Health Center. Its inpatient program provides for adults only. Children and teens needing inpatient treatment usually are sent to Georgia Regional Hospital or the Georgia Mental Health Institute in Atlanta.

With all this in mind, here is a rundown of Cobb's treatment centers. Most of the programs employ social workers, addiction counselors, family therapists, psychi-

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Smyrna Hospital, 3949 South Cobb Drive, Smyrna. 434-0710.

STRAIGHT Inc., 2221 Austell Road, Marietta. 434-8679.

For more information:

PRIDE, (National Parent Resources and Information on Drug Education), 50 Hurt Plaza, Suite 210, Atlanta, Ga. 30303. 577-4500. PRIDE is a national, private, non-profit organization formed to stop the drug epidemic, especially among adolescents and young adults. It stresses family and community involvement.

atric nurses and expressive therapists. Most teen centers also have education specialists who keep in touch with the child's home school.

■ **Brawner Psychiatric Institute** in Smyrna has inpatient and outpatient programs for children, adolescents and adults, with age groups housed separately. The average length of stay for adults is 21 days; children and teens stay longer. The outpatient recovery center sees about 160 people a week and claims a success rate of 60 percent. The cost is \$425 a night and includes group therapy charges.

■ **The Cobb/Douglas Mental Health Center** runs an inpatient program for adults. First-Step. The unit has 15 beds and is filled on a first-come, first-served basis. Patients must volunteer for First Step and must be medically approved for participation. The program includes detoxification and a 28-day, 12-step program. Pay is on a sliding-fee basis, and if the client has no insurance and no income, the fee is adjusted. Most patients pay a minimum of \$420 for the 28 days, and have up to a year to pay. Those who have insurance or income are referred to a hospital or private clinic.

The 110 adult outpatients at the Cobb/Douglas Mental Health Center share three alcohol/drug counselors, two registered nurses and one social worker. Costs for the outpatient program start at \$110 for a 15-minute session. Recidivism rates in the mental health center programs are "fairly high," according to the lead nurse for the program.

■ **At Cobb Hospital and Medical Center**, adult substance abusers are treated in the hospital; children and adolescents have a free-standing building on the grounds. There are 24 beds for youngsters and 26 beds for adults. In the child-adolescent unit, costs run \$548.50 a day, which includes group therapy charges.

The adult unit at Cobb Hospital performs crisis stabilization, which usually lasts 14 days. The patient then is referred to an outpatient program. Recidivism statistics are not available. Cost for a semiprivate adult stay is \$430/bed/night plus \$60 group therapy and \$37 activity therapy charge.

■ **Kennestone Hospital** has a 38-bed unit that houses adult and adolescent psychiatric and substance-abuse patients. Eight of those beds are for acutely ill and detoxification patients. Cost of treatment in the mental health unit is \$450 a day for acute care; in the chemical dependence unit, it's \$365 a day. The cost is \$420 for adolescent psychiatric or chemical dependence patients. Fees include group therapy, but not medical tests or medications or physician charges.

■ **Kennestone at Windy Hill's** intervention unit for adults treats those with substance abuse/psychiatric/medical diagnoses. The fee of \$365 a day includes therapy.

Neither Kennestone program measures its recidivism rate, but spokeswoman Heidi Isom said it is "very high." She added, "The quality of a program is measured

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by what the program offers. What you can do is lessen the intensity of the episodes and lengthen the time between episodes.

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Administrators of the relatively new adult program do not keep statistics on recidivism, but said that more than 50 percent of their patients continue in some type of after-care program. The program costs \$450 a night for adult inpatients, which includes group therapy and up to a year of after-care.

■ **Ridgeview Institute** in Smyrna has comprehensive inpatient and outpatient programs for teenagers and adults. The substance abuse units are separate from the psychiatric units at the private hospital. Adults have 62 beds available; adolescents have 34 beds. The campus also has a gymnasium, outdoor pool, tennis court and walking trails, and runs its own certified private school for teens.

The cost for an adult in treatment at Ridgeview is \$395 a day for room and board, which includes nursing services, all group therapy, activity therapy and education classes. The cost for an average 29-day stay is \$12,900, which includes a \$50-a-day fee for miscellaneous items such as pharmacy and laboratory charges. The hospital claims that at the end of two years of treatment, about 85 percent of its patients have not relapsed.

■ **STRAIGHT Inc.** is a non-residential substance-abuse program for adolescents and young adults. Located on Austell Road, the program treats about 130 young people. The center stresses large-group therapy, family therapy and some individual counseling. Clients are housed with "host families," usually parents who live in the area.

The cost of STRAIGHT averages \$35 a day during the length of the treatment, usually about a year.

Formal education is suspended while a client attends the STRAIGHT program. Participants are encouraged to become involved in the community, church and family once they leave active treatment. STRAIGHT administrators claim a "success rate" of 70 percent.