



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Carolyn Kyle  
VP, Strategic Initiatives  
Gateway Healthcare  
Tel: (401) 724-8400 ext. 212  
Fax: (401) 724-8488  
Email: [ckyle@gatewayhealth.org](mailto:ckyle@gatewayhealth.org)

Who: Gateway Healthcare  
What: PRESS CONFERENCE: launch of Mental Health First Aid training in Rhode Island  
When: Tuesday, April 22, 2008 at 11:00 am  
Where: 101 Bacon Street, Pawtucket, RI 02860

*Pawtucket* — Gateway Healthcare on April 22 will announce the launch of Mental Health First Aid, an innovative training program designed to help members of the public support an individual experiencing a mental health crisis. Participants in the April 22 event will include U.S. Congressman Patrick Kennedy; Dr. Ellen R. Nelson, director of the Rhode Island Department of Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals (MHRH); and Elizabeth Earls, executive director of the Rhode Island Council of Community Mental Health Organizations.

Mental Health First Aid, a 12-hour course developed in Australia is designed to educate people about the symptoms and treatments associated with common mental illnesses. In giving people simple tools for assisting someone they encounter who is experiencing a mental health crisis, the course is being seen worldwide as a powerful method for destigmatizing mental illness and improving mental health literacy in the general population.

Gateway is one of seven community mental health organizations nationally that has been selected to pilot a first-ever training curriculum in the U.S. under the direction of the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare (NCCBH). The other sites selected are the Mental Health Center of Denver (Denver, CO); Seminole Community Mental Health Center (Fern Park, FL); Community Counseling Centers of Chicago (Chicago, IL); North Central Behavioral Health (La Salle, IL); Iowa State Dept. of Health (Des Moines, IA); and Bert Nash Community Mental Health Center (Lawrence, KS). Leaders at the National Council, the professional association for community mental health centers, are working toward making Mental Health First Aid skills as common as medical first aid and CPR among those who come into contact with a person in need.

“This helps people to understand behavioral health care issues,” said Gateway president Richard Leclerc. “It doesn’t expect that they will do anything other than their appropriate role. We see this project as an investment in the community.”

“As we continue to work together on mental health parity and reducing stigma, programs such as Mental Health First Aid will play a critical role. I am delighted that the state of Rhode Island and Gateway Healthcare has been selected as one of the first site in the nation to launch this important initiative,” said Congressman Patrick Kennedy.

Congressman Kennedy is the leading champion for reducing the stigma associated with mental illness and improving the policy and practice environment for the treatment for mental illness.

In the same way that medical first aid does not train a person to diagnose a condition or act as a medical professional, Mental Health First Aid allows someone to offer initial help before the individual in crisis receives professional treatment.

"Mental Health First Aid will increase awareness of mental illness overall," said Ellen R. Nelson, PhD, Director of the Department of Mental Health, Retardation, and Hospitals. "When we understand the risk factors and warning signs of mental illness, we are in a good position to provide help and support, connecting individuals with needed resources."

“I take hope in something like Mental Health First Aid. We need to continue to normalize people’s responses to these diseases, to increase compassion and to reduce fear,” said Elizabeth Earls, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Council of Community Mental Health Organizations.

Gateway will employ the Mental Health First Aid training curriculum and is defining the target groups for its initial training sessions, expected to begin in May. In Australia and other nations that have widely adopted Mental Health First Aid, the course is offered to professional groups that routinely come into contact with the public, such as health workers, law enforcement officers and teachers. The courses also have been made available to any citizen who wants to learn more about the signs of a mental health crisis and how to help someone in need.

The Mental Health First Aid program in Australia has been evaluated using randomized controlled trials and studies. The findings showed an improvement in the participants’ knowledge of mental disorders, reducing stigma and increasing the amount of help provided to others. The study even found that those who took the course reported a positive effect on their own mental well-being.

For more information about Mental Health First Aid, visit [www.mhfa.com.au](http://www.mhfa.com.au).

*About Gateway Healthcare, Inc.:*

*Gateway Healthcare, Inc., a non-profit behavioral healthcare organization, provides a broad spectrum of preventative and treatment programs for children, adolescents, families, and adults throughout Rhode Island suffering from severe mental illness, substance abuse problems, and emotional and behavioral disorders. Gateway Healthcare, Inc. is headquartered in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Gateway serves over 14,000 children, adults and families each year.*

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