Healthy Minds and Bodies: Counseling Services Now Available at North Recreation Center

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Students have increased access to mental health services with the opening of a new location of Counseling & Psych Services.

Located inside the Recreation and Wellness Center ? known as NorthRec ? near East Mabel Street and North Fremont Avenue, CAPS North recently opened a suite comprising 15 therapist offices, two group rooms and one administrative office.

With a recent expansion of mental health services for students, nine new therapists have joined the existing team of 18 who work at CAPS. CAPS North also has two part-time psychiatry providers, in addition to the existing four who are based at the main CAPS offices at Campus Health, which is located in Highland Commons.

Having the new location has allowed CAPS to greatly expand its counseling capabilities, according to Glenn Matchett-Morris, associate director of CAPS.

"The new location essentially duplicates all the services that CAPS Main at Campus Health already provides," he says. "Just as we do at our main location, CAPS North focuses on triage, individual and group counseling, outreach and consultation."

He emphasizes that all CAPS locations are available to all students. That includes a third, smaller CAPS office adjacent to Yuma residence hall, which offers appointment-only services.

The CAPS clinical team includes licensed psychologists, professional counselors, marriage and family therapists, and social workers as well as board-certified psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners. CAPS clinicians come from a variety of backgrounds, areas of specialty and approaches to treatment. CAPS staff are split equally between the two main locations, with some working in both.

Students can turn to CAPS for the full spectrum of counseling and mental health care and support, including issues surrounding learning and attention; eating and body image concerns; relationship problems, sexual assault and relationship violence; and substance abuse and recovery. Specialized care is available for the LGBTQ population. CAPS also offers consultative services for concerned family members, friends, faculty and staff.

A Perfect Match

CAPS North's unique location, tucked inside the second floor of the three-story Recreation and Wellness Center, may make it one of the few to be integrated into a campus recreation center, according to Matchett-Morris. The connection between physical and mental wellness is a natural one, and as CAPS professionals settle into their new location, they have already
begun to explore how the two facilities could collaborate and cross-pollinate each other through their respective offerings and programs.

"We have already begun to connect with Rec Center employees and student staff to explore how we can integrate some of their programs into our services, and how they can tap into ours," says CAPS psychologist Sarah May. "Mind and body are connected, and so there is a natural connection between exercise and mental health."

Harry McDermott, staff physician at Campus Health and professor in the Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health, agrees.

"We know from research that exercise is medicine," he says. "Not only does it lower blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar and body weight, but it also positively improves mental health, lowers stress, and improves mood and sleep. It even helps against depression."

So far, most interactions between the two units have taken place at the supervisory level, Matchett-Morris says. CAPS staff members have provided training to North Rec staff members to better enable them to spot students who visit the gym to exercise but who may benefit from CAPS services.

"For example, what are signs we look for that someone might be distressed, and do we approach them or not and, if so, how?" says Matchett-Morris. "And how do we encourage them to walk over to CAPS?"

Shawna Kroh, a mental health clinician and licensed professional counselor at CAPS North, says she and her colleagues focus more on solutions to the problem, and less on getting to the root cause of the problem.

"For example, if someone comes to us for anxiety, we are not going to figure out how and why the anxiety originated," she says. "Rather, we try to figure out how to fix the anxiety today, and we empower the student with skills they can use that help them concentrate on their homework or pass the test, or get along with friends, parents or a romantic partner."

"If we determine that a student needs longer-term care, we can help them find additional community resources," Kroh adds.

Kroh says that even during its short existence, the new location has been busy meeting requests for information. Recent activities include a presentation on CAPS services at the Honors College across the street and an event on the Mall offering resources about depression.

A Fresh Setting

Thoughtfully designed with a contemporary vibe and modern furniture, CAPS North offers a welcoming, calming and positive environment to both the staff who work there and their clients.

"Everybody here is very excited to be in a new environment and have new roles," says Matchett-Morris, who has been with CAPS for 11 years.
"Both our team and the Rec Center staff jointly feel ownership in the entire space," he says. "The employees who moved over really enjoy the new space, and since it’s a little bit smaller of a team at the new location, the bonding and support have been a little easier, it seems."

"I love that we are not isolated from the students, because they are here at the gym and see us all the time," adds Kroh, who joined the team this year. To a mental health professional like herself, whose previous work experience was in group and individual therapy in hospital and residential facility settings, working on campus is a welcome change.

"Working with college students is new and nice to me, because I get to work on problems before they progress to a point where they become really bad," she says. "I feel that I can have a better chance to intervene while my clients are younger."

More information about CAPS is at https://health.arizona.edu/counseling-psych-services [1].

University employees interested in a consultation or treatment for mental health concerns are encouraged to contact Life & Work Connections [2].