Creating a Safety Net for the Acutely Intoxicated:  
Systems collaborate for sobering centers

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Learning outcomes

- Understand the programmatic elements and role of sobering centers in the United States
- Examine current policy deliberations regarding the use of sobering centers as an alternate destination for emergency services
- Argue the feasibility of establishing sobering centers as an alternate destination to the ED for acute intoxication
Insanity…
Doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results.

Attributed to Albert Einstein
Also phrased as: “The purest form of insanity is to leave everything the same and at the same time hope that things will change”

What is a sobering center?

- Public facility where individuals with acute intoxication can safely recover from the effects of alcohol and/or drugs
- Over 40 sobering programs nationally
- Target populations
  - Binge drinkers
  - Large-scale events with anticipated alcohol consumption
  - Chronically intoxicated, many who are without homes

Definition offered by: National Sobering Collaborative
What do you think?

- From what you know now, would you be in support of a sobering center operating as an alternate destination to the ED?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Sobering Center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Sleep-Off</td>
<td>Fairbanks</td>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>Sobering Center CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Murphy</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>San Francisco Sobering Center CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission Street</td>
<td>Contra Costa County CA</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>StarVista Burlingame CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Barbara Sobering, CA</td>
<td>Salinas (Monterey County), CA</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>McAlister Sobering San Diego</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baltimore City Stabilization, MD</td>
<td>CASPAR Cambridge MA</td>
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<td>Hennepin County MN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anchorage NM</td>
<td>12 &amp; 12 Tulsa OK</td>
<td></td>
<td>OKC Metro Alliance Oklahoma City OK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central City Concern</td>
<td>William Moore Center Medford OR</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>Salem Marion County OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willamette Family Eugene OR</td>
<td>Sober Center Charleston SC</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>Safe Solutions Rapid City SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restoration Center</td>
<td>Houston Recovery Center TX</td>
<td>TX</td>
<td>The Sobering Center Austin TX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch Shisler Sobering, Seattle WA</td>
<td>Sobering Center of Tacoma WA</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>South End Sobering Renton WA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACK Sobering Center - Wichita KS</td>
<td>Lifeline Sobering Unit - Vancouver WA</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Funding sources

- City or county general funds
- Health department
- Criminal justice system (police, sheriff)
- State
- Grant funding (i.e. Whole Person Care, foundations)

- Big Question: Sustainability for sobering centers
## Typical Sobering Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vital signs</td>
<td>at admission, then q2-4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial assessment</td>
<td>basic physical assessment, GCS/orientation, drinking patterns, withdrawal history, blood alcohol level (breathalyzer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>rewarming, oral rehydration, food, vitamins, wound care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hygiene</td>
<td>showers, laundry, delousing, clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screening</td>
<td>screening for substance use disorder, behavioral health, treatment interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referrals</td>
<td>treatment, shelter, case management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Additional Services Offered

**Adults who are homeless**
- Hygiene, nutrition
- Shelter access
- Case management
- Medical oversight: chronic conditions
- Residential referrals – detox, rehabilitation, managed alcohol programs
- Entitlements (SSI, General Assistance, Insurance)

**Systemic High Utilization**
- Hub for individuals who may be high utilizers at other urgent/emergent services system-wide
- Provide central point for coordination and service connection
- Intensive case management
Example: Emergency Capability on Site

• AED
• Bag-valve-mask
• Oxygen concentrator & tanks
• Non-rebreather masks, nasal cannulas, nebulizer

• Medications
  • Chest pain: aspirin, oxygen, nitroglycerin
  • Opioid OD: naloxone
  • Hypoglycemia: glucagon

• Standardized Procedures for Registered Nurses

Examples of Sobering Centers
Salinas (Monterey County), California

Houston, Texas
San Jose (Santa Clara County), CA

San Francisco, California
Santa Cruz, California

Boston’s SPOT “Supportive Place for Observation and Treatment”
Emergency Medical Services & Sobering Centers

Emergency Medical Systems Authority
California State Pilot

- Health Workforce Pilot Project
  - Evaluating “Community Paramedicine” and alternate destinations
- SF Sobering Center as an “alternative destination” for paramedic transports
LA County EMS “Sober Unit”
Nurse Practitioner, Paramedic & Outreach Worker

Austin Sobering Center & Travis County EMS
Sobering Care: Surge Services

Implications for Policy
Discussion: Sobering as Alternate Destination

- Research on sobering centers and outcomes
- Distinct alternate destination policies
- Sustainability
- Accreditation/Designation
- Minimum standards
- Back-end support for substance use disorders

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What Information Still Needed?

From what you know now, would you be in support of a sobering center operating as an alternate destination to the ED?

What needs to be in place to ensure this is done safely, effectively, sustainably?
“Only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable.”

—Milton Friedman
Quoted in UCSF Claudia Chauffan’s recent paper on single payer healthcare

Join us! Oct 11-12, 2019
National Sobering Summit
www.nationalsobering.org

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