

**Title of Presentation:** Improving Mental Health: The Use of Functional Assessment to Monitor Rehabilitative Progress

**Principal Presenter:** Adam L. Wasserman, Ph.D.  
Title: Psychological Resident  
Organization: Florida State Hospital  
Address: PO Box 1000  
Chattahoochee, FL 32324  
E-mail: Adam\_wasseman@dcf.state.fl.us

**Additional Presenter:** Lawrence V. Annis, Ph.D.  
Title: Psychological Services Director  
Organization: Florida State Hospital  
Address: PO Box 1000  
Chattahoochee, FL 32324  
E-mail: Larry\_Annis@dcf.state.fl.us

**Additional Presenter:** Jim Warren  
Title: Assistant Hospital Director  
Organization: Florida State Hospital  
Address: PO Box 1000  
Chattahoochee, FL 32324  
E-mail: Jim\_Warren@dcf.state.fl.us

The effectiveness of services provided to persons with major mental illness can be determined several ways. A traditional indicator is clinical assessment that details the severity of a person's mental illness and the effect this has on functioning within specific areas. Recent years have seen a movement from clinical assessment to a more robust evaluation of how a person functions in major life activities. On the national level, the need to examine the "whole person" was stated in The President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health (2003). The Commission defined adults with serious mental illness as persons that meet the criteria for a major "mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder" (as defined by the DSM) that have "functional impairment which substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activities." The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines functional impairment "as difficulties that substantially interfere with or limit role functioning in one or more major life activities." The Regional Objectives of the Southern States Psychiatric Hospital Association include education to reduce the stigma of mental illness, involvement of the persons receiving services and family members, improvement in access to quality care that is culturally competent, and the accurate identification and treatment of co-occurring mental and substance related disorders. A primary goal of the Florida Department of Children and Families is to ensure the "well-being and self-sufficiency for the people we serve." The guiding principles for the Department include improving the quality of life and level of functioning for persons receiving mental health services. In order to

determine how well each of the principles are addressed by the services provided by the Department, accurate measurement of treatment progress is necessary. In the past, treatment progress was viewed in terms of how well a person's clinical presentation responds to provided services. The Positive and Negative Syndrome Scale (PANSS) served as one the Department's primary measures of treatment improvement. While clinical measures such as the PANSS can illuminate how a person's psychiatric symptoms change in response to treatment, these measures do not directly address a person's functional abilities. In other words, clinical measures address only the psychiatric functioning of an individual, not how well they are functioning in areas such as relationships with others, medical concerns, dangerous to self or others, etc. The Department's Functional Assessment Workgroup convened in 2003 to offer recommendations for a new "outcome" measure. Following reviews of many published measures, the Functional Assessment Rating Scale (FARS) was chosen as the new indicator for treatment progress. The FARS includes 18 domains that document an individual's level of cognitive, medical, and behavioral (social or role) functioning that can be grouped into several categories. Domains address such areas as depression, anxiety, family relationships, work or school functioning, medical or physical concerns, and security/management needs. Scores on the FARS range from 1 (No Problem) to 9 (Extreme Problem). The basis for assigning ratings is the individual's current (within last three weeks) problem severity for each functional domain. Since July 2004, Florida State Hospital (FSH) has served as a major data collection site for the Statewide FARS project. Currently 40 psychology staff have been certified to administer and score FARS, and over four hundred FARS have been completed. The purpose of this presentation is to discuss the development of FSH's FARS Utilization Program and to describe how FARS data is incorporated into service planning.