

in conjunction with

The New York State Council for
Community Behavioral Healthcare

Salary and Turnover Survey of Community Based Mental Health Agencies in New York State for FY2000

Summary: A survey of salaries and turnover in community-based mental health agencies in New York State shows high turnover and poor retention among direct-care staff. The survey further compares salaries and turnover in agencies that employ union workers and those that employ non-union workers, as union workers are typically able to negotiate wage increases or Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) with some regularity. The survey demonstrates that union agencies pay higher salaries while having lower turnover and greater retention of experienced staff than their non-union counterparts. Lower turnover translates into better care, as service recipients experience fewer disruptions in the continuity of care.

The New York State community-based delivery system for mental health provides services to thousands of New Yorkers. Most of the agencies that provide these services are heavily reliant upon government—particularly the State of New York—for the resources that make these services possible. Mental health funding sources include Medi-

caid and Medicare reimbursements, State Aid to Localities, and New York City Department of Mental Health and other county-based service dollars.

Unlike other social service sectors— notably physical health—the mental health sector is not eligible for an automatic cost of living adjustment (COLA). As a result, unless the legislature makes a COLA available, providers of services can expect flat service contracts and flat Medicaid reimbursement rates. In out years when COLAs are not legislated, these agencies effectively experience funding cuts as they are required to provide the same services with dollars that do not maintain their value. Unfortunately, these ‘out years’ happen with much greater frequency than years in which a COLA is approved.

Over the last ten years, the community-based mental health sector has received just two COLAs: for FY 2000, a COLA was passed for 1.5% for non-residential programs and for 2.0% for residential programs both of which are funded through local assistance; the other increase was a dollar-capped 2.5% COLA that had a number of additional restrictions which severely limited its scope. The real impact of this COLA on the entire sector—even on aggregate agency budgets—was far less than 2.5%. In total, community-based agencies have received cumulative COLA increases of less than four percent since 1990; meanwhile, other Medicaid providers in New York State have received COLAs that average 3.4% *per year*.

An unfortunate consequence of the lack of a COLA has been an increase in turnover—particularly among experienced staff. The implications of high staff turnover for consumers is particularly troublesome given the high priority placed on the therapeutic relationship between direct care workers and those they serve. This survey addresses, quantitatively and quantifiably, the problem of low salaries and high turnover among com-

munity-based mental health agencies.

This survey was conducted by The Coalition of Voluntary Mental Health Agencies in late October through December of 2000. It was an attempt to capture empirical data about salaries for new and experienced direct-care staff, as well as, via extrapolation, information about turnover during the most recently completed fiscal year. FY2000 ran from July 1, 1999 to June 30, 2000.

While the survey was, at first, limited to the approximately 110 members of the Coalition of Voluntary Mental Health Agencies, our partnership with the New York State Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare yielded an additional pool of approximately 55 agencies to whom the survey was directly applicable. By the time the survey was completed in December of 2000, data from approximately 181 programs had been collected. These programs represent, in whole or in part, 39 agencies that were funded with grants from New York State. Collectively, these agencies accounted for more than \$200 million of the State's budget for community mental health in FY2000.

After sending out an initial volley of surveys, the Coalition engaged a sample of agencies who participated in a focus group to identify problem areas that may not have been captured by the data. This focus group confirmed anecdotally that the salaries they offered employees were frequently cited as a cause of dissatisfaction when an employee decided to leave. Although this information is important, it is not necessarily dispositive; exiting employees rarely use the exit interview to raise issues about the job environment that may have contributed to job dissatisfaction.

Of note, the other issues that this focus group identified that were not included in the survey included: extremely high turnover for bilingual staff, Spanish speakers in particular; longer and longer time before new staff are hired—consensus was 2-6 months, with some

reporting time longer than a year; clients who drop out as a result of staff turnover—up to 45%; and finally, that new professional hires have decreasing levels of experience and leave shortly after obtaining Medicaid-required experience levels.

The survey itself separates staff into four categories along two axes: professional/non-professional, and supervisory/non-supervisory, and tracks information about time with the organization (greater or less than 1 year), salary at beginning/end of the year, and other information (see appendix A). In particular, the professional axis is a measure of educational attainment, while the supervisory axis is a measure of role in the agency. An employee with a CSW, Ph.D. or MD is considered a professional, while one with a BA, AA, or H.S. Diploma is considered a non-professional. For example, a case manager with a BA would show up as non-professional, non-supervisory; a CSW who coordinates a program would be categorized as professional, supervisory.

In addition to the four sections of the survey dealing with different categories of staff, there were two additional sections; one which attempted to capture information about funding sources and another which tried to identify opportunities for professional development within the organization.

The section on funding sources was designed with two purposes: 1) to capture information about the agency's reliance on state funding, and what percentage, if any, came from other sources and 2) to ascertain if and to what extent organizations that operate multiple programs commingle funds in order to support under-funded programs with excesses from better funded programs.

The last section concerns staff training, credentialing, and budgets for staff-training.

As a final addendum to the data that was collected from agencies, additional information on unionization was obtained by telephone. The premise of the task was to dis-

cern whether and to what extent there was a difference between the salary and/or retention of employees who are members of a union. Union employees are generally able to negotiate cost of living adjustments independent of State-legislated COLAs. Typically, non-union employees are given pay increases at the discretion of their employers who are, in turn, reliant upon their contracts with OMH, DMH or other local governmental unit for additional personnel costs. If union shops had higher salaries and lower turnover rates, this would strongly suggest a link between COLAs, higher salaries, and the quality of care received by consumers. In fact, this is just what the survey demonstrated.

The data reported here is in three bundles: one that represents descriptive information about all respondents; one for union agencies, and one for non-union agencies.

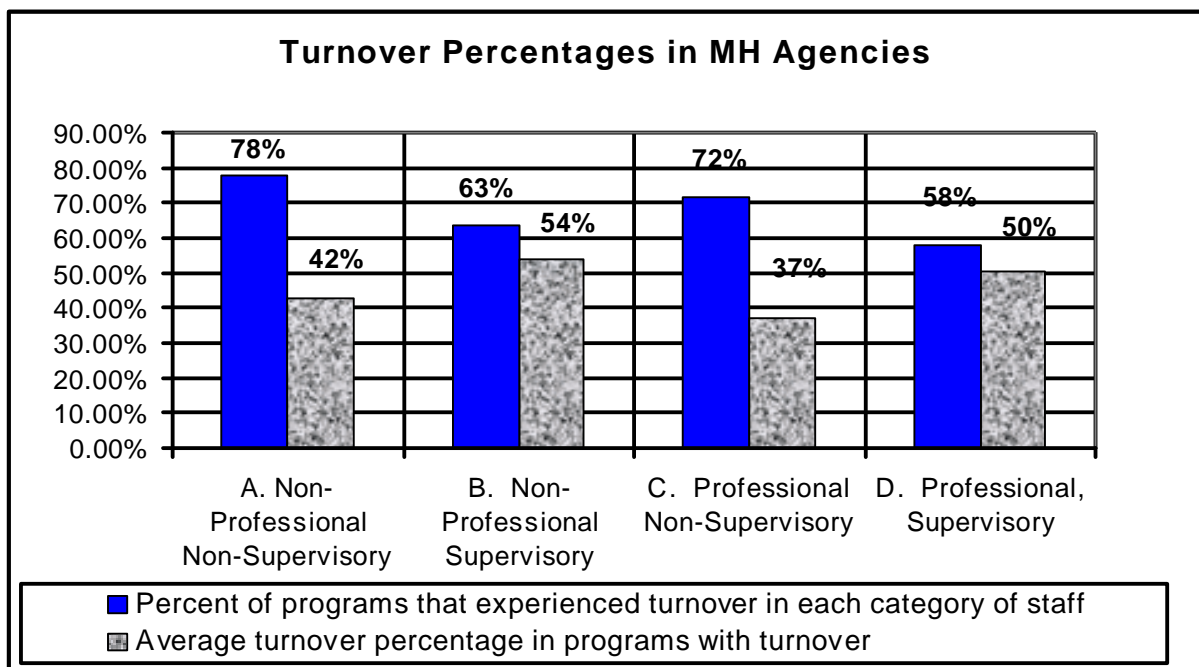
Total Data:

Staff, turnover, and salary levels

- ▶ The survey shows data from 181 programs run by 39 agencies. Collectively they accounted for \$205.4 million, a substantial portion of the state’s budget for

community based, outpatient mental health services.

- ▶ The organizations and programs included in the survey employed 3,604 employees. Over the course of the last fiscal year, 1,048 employees left their jobs.
- ▶ At the end of the last fiscal year, 2,269 direct care staff had worked in their current program longer than a year. This was 63% of the total number of employees.
- ▶ Agencies experienced high incidence of turnover with high turnover averages in each category of staff (see graph below):
 - ▶ 8 of 10 agencies with non-professional, non-supervisory employees experienced some level of turnover. On average 42% of the staff turned over.
 - ▶ 6 of 10 agencies with non-professional supervisory employees experienced turnover. On average 54% of the staff turned over.
 - ▶ 7 of 10 agencies with Professional, non-supervisory employees ex-



Total Data

Total number of discrete programs: 181
 Total number of agencies responding: 39
 Total MH Budget \$205,392,291

	A. Non-Professional Non-Supervisory	B. Non-Professional Supervisory	C. Professional Non-Supervisory	D. Professional, Supervisory	TOTALS*
Number of programs with this level of staff	135	78	159	163	
Total number of employees at the start of the fiscal year (July 1, 1999)	1,695	176	1,219	498	3587
Total number of employees at the end of the fiscal year (June 30, 2000)	1,745	181	1,182	497	3604
Number of employees who have been with the programs longer than one year	973	98	857	342	2269
Percent of total employees of this level who have been with the program longer than one year	57.38%	55.63%	70.30%	68.64%	62.99%
Total number of employees of this level who left their positions	534	46	346	123	1048
Total number of employees of this level who left their position and who had been with the program for longer than a year	268	29	253	82	631
Percent of programs that experienced turnover in each category of staff	77.78%	63.33%	71.62%	58.11%	
Average turnover percentage in programs with turnover	42.46%	54.08%	37.26%	50.16%	
Of the total turnover for staff of this level, the percentage due to the departure of staff who had been with the program longer than one year (turnover from staff with the program longer than one year/total turnover)	50.16%	63.04%	73.10%	66.67%	
Of the programs that experienced turnover, the average percentage due to the departure of staff with the program longer than one year	69.24%	69.30%	72.72%	76.14%	
Salary					
Salary per staff of incumbent staff	\$12.17	\$14.78	\$20.63	\$24.72	
Salary per staff of new hires	\$12.07	\$13.58	\$19.05	\$23.76	
Percent Difference in Salary of new staff paid versus incumbent staff	0.85%	8.83%	8.30%	4.03%	

* Number may not add correctly because of rounding

perienced some level of turnover. On average 37% of the staff turned over.

- ▶ 6 of 10 agencies with non-professional, non-supervisory employees experienced some level of turnover. On average 50% of the staff turned over.
- ▶ Staff with the agency longer than one year was responsible for a percentage of turnover between 69.2% and 76.1% depending on the category of staff. In other words, of each staff member that left, at

least two of every three had been with the agency longer than one year.

Funding Sources

Most of the agencies that responded to the survey included information on funding levels. The average level of support coming from government sources was 94.92%. This represents an amalgam of state, local and federal funds and includes such programs as Medicaid, Medicare, Reinvestment, and other contract-based services.

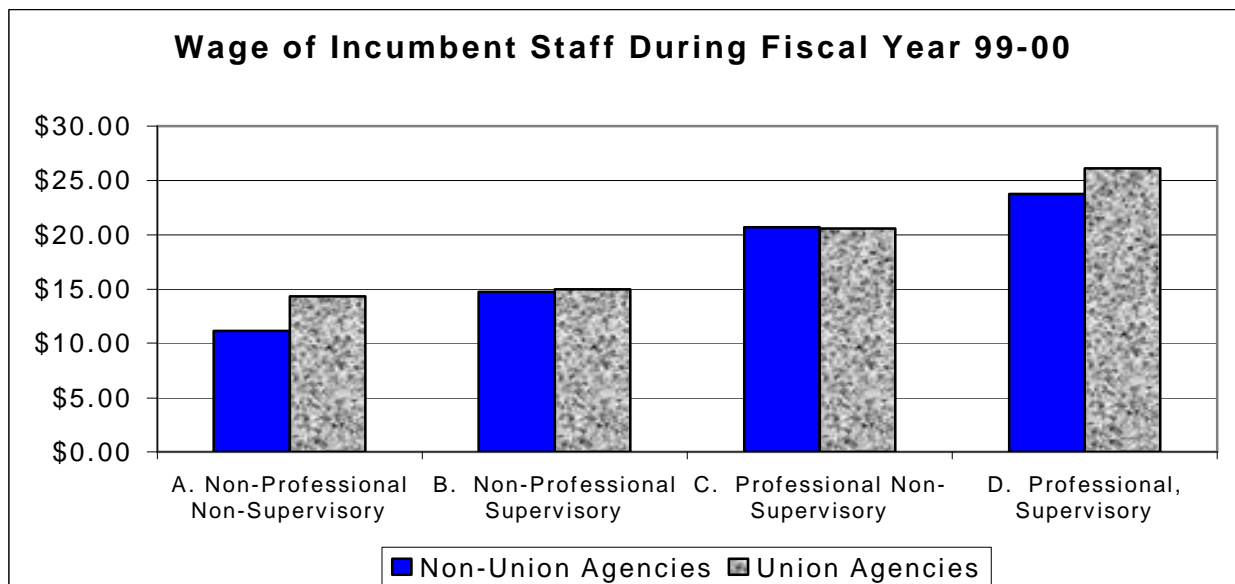
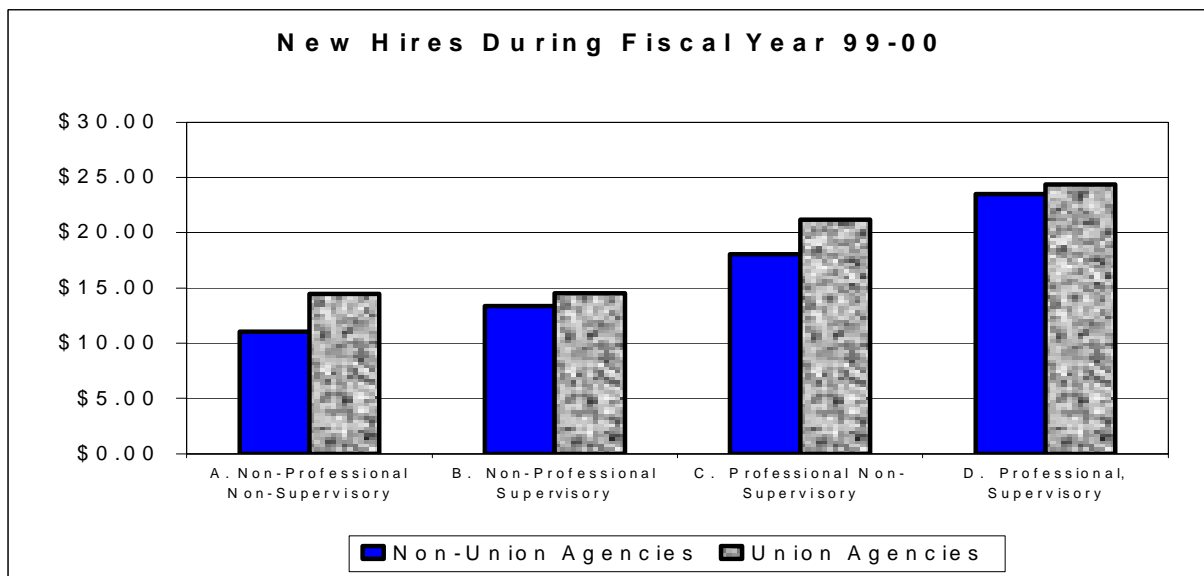
Unfortunately, this section did not yield

information that can be reported with a high degree of validity. The unit was not reported consistently across each survey; some were reported at the agency level which frequently included many different programs, while others were reported at the program level. For example, one program could report funding in the amount of \$1.5 million of pure State funds, while another agency with a total budget of \$10 million is 95% funded by the State. The reported average weighs these equally for an average state contribution of 97.5%. Furthermore, program and agency

budgets were not available on a detailed enough level to reliably weigh the figures for state-dollar percentage.

Comparison of Union and Non-Union Agencies

At the start of the fiscal year 1999-2000 the community-based mental health agencies included in the survey employed 2,320 Non-Union workers in direct-care positions. They represent 158 programs in 35 agencies. There were 1,268 Union employees in the same sec-



	Union Agencies	Non-Union Agencies
Non-Professional Non-Supervisory	8 of 10 experience turnover; turnover rates average 40%	8 of 10 experience turnover; turnover rates average 43%
Non-Professional Supervisory	5 of 10 experience turnover; turnover rates average 44%	6 of 10 experience turnover; turnover rates average 54%
Professional Non-Supervisory	5 of 10 experience turnover; turnover rates average 25%	8 of 10 experience turnover; turnover rates average 39%
Professional Supervisory	6 of 10 experience turnover; turnover rates average 36%	5 of 10 experience turnover; turnover rates average 54%

tor at the start of the year, representing 23 programs in 4 agencies.

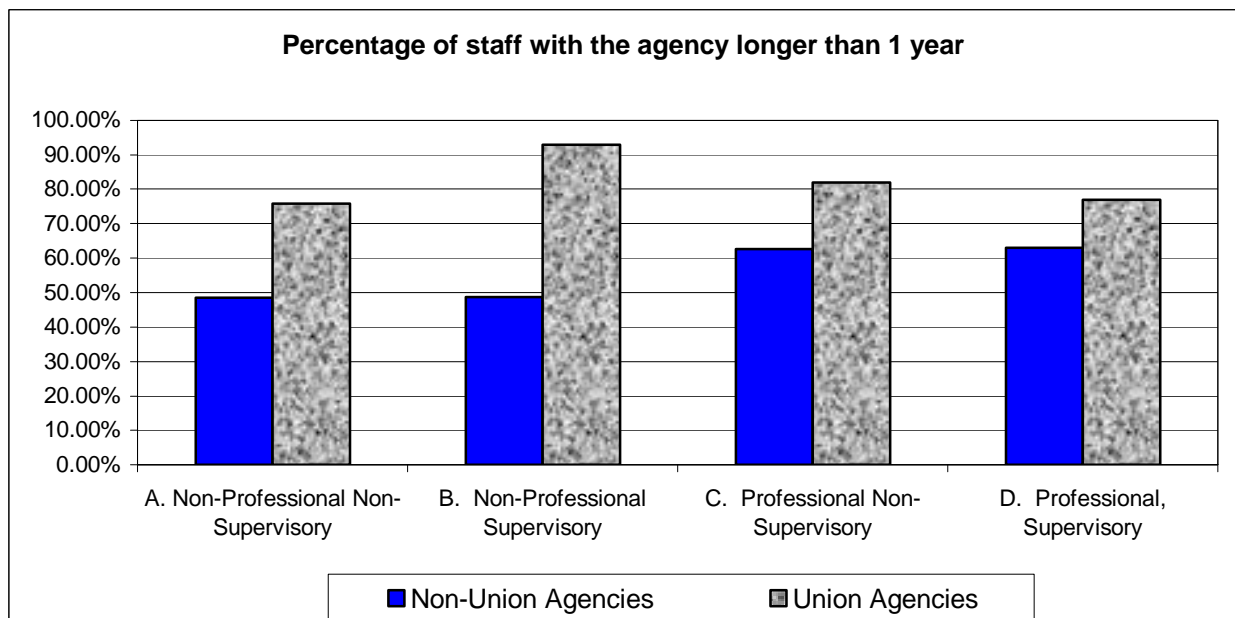
There were three main characteristics of the difference between Union and Non-Union agencies. Union agencies had significantly higher levels of incumbent staff, lower turnover rates, and, almost without exception, higher salaries.

Salary Differences

- ▶ For new hires, staff in Union agencies earned a greater per-hour wage for all categories of staff. (See graph “New Hires”)
- ▶ Incumbent staff in Union agencies were

paid more than incumbent staff in Non-Union agencies in all but one category of staff. The biggest difference was in wage for non-professional, non-supervisory staff. In this category, union staff earned an additional \$3.18 per hour over their non-union counterparts. This was the most populous category of staff. (See graph “Incumbent Staff”)

- ▶ The only category of staff with a higher wage in non-Union agencies was professional non-supervisory where the difference is \$0.11 per hour—a difference of .5%.



Union Agencies

Total number of discrete programs: 23
 Total number of agencies responding: 4
 Total MH Budget \$73,065,382

	A. Non-Professional Non-Supervisory	B. Non-Professional Supervisory	C. Professional Non-Supervisory	D. Professional, Supervisory	TOTALS*
Number of programs with this level of staff	17	4	23	21	
Total number of employees at the start of the fiscal year (July 1, 1999)	550	28	487	203	1268
Total number of employees at the end of the fiscal year (June 30, 2000)	532	31	442	193	1198
Number of employees who have been with the programs longer than one year	417	26	399	156	998
Percent of total employees of this level who have been with the program longer than one year	75.80%	92.86%	81.95%	76.79%	81.85%
Total number of employees of this level who left their positions	173	8	140	47	367
Total number of employees of this level who left their position and who had been with the program for longer than a year	99	6	117	32	253
Percent of programs that experienced turnover in each category of staff	80.00%	50.00%	50.00%	64.29%	
Average turnover percentage in programs with turnover	40.05%	44.44%	25.09%	36.27%	
Of the total turnover for staff of this level, the percentage due to the departure of staff who had been with the program longer than one year (turnover from staff with the program longer than one year/total turnover)	57.15%	75.00%	83.54%	68.09%	
Of the programs that experienced turnover, the average percentage due to the departure of staff with the program longer than one year	58.99%	75.00%	98.44%	87.29%	
Salary					
Salary per staff of incumbent staff	\$14.32	\$14.98	\$20.56	\$26.12	
Salary per staff of new hires	\$14.43	\$14.47	\$21.21	\$24.35	
Percent Difference in Salary of new staff paid versus incumbent staff	-0.80%	3.54%	-3.07%	7.26%	

* Number may not add correctly because of rounding

Staff Experience

- ▶ 82% of Union staff consisted of individuals who had been with the program longer than one year. In Non-Union agencies, this was 56%.

Staff Retention

- ▶ Union and Non-Union agencies were roughly similar in the likelihood that they experienced turnover in each category of staff; however, the average turnover rates in union agencies are substantially lower than non-union agencies.

The Data Collected

As with any survey, there were issues of reporting. Many agencies did not report data for the final category of the survey which looks at staff learning and credentialing (Appendix A, section F). As a result it became clear through the data collection that this category was too inconsistent to be a reliable source of information. The final compilation of statistical data does not include information from this section.

The other problem concerned the use of

Non-Union Agencies

Total number of discrete programs: 158
 Total number of agencies responding: 35
 Total MH Budget \$132,326,909

	A. Non- Professional Non- Supervisory	B. Non- Professional Supervisory	C. Professional Non- Supervisory	D. Professional, Supervisory	TOTALS*
Number of programs with this level of staff	132	74	136	142	
Total number of employees at the start of the fiscal year (July 1, 1999)	1,146	148	732	295	2320
Total number of employees at the end of the fiscal year (June 30, 2000)	1,213	150	740	304	2406
Number of employees who have been with the programs longer than one year	556	72	458	186	1271
Percent of total employees of this level who have been with the program longer than one year	48.54%	48.58%	62.54%	63.05%	55.68%
Total number of employees of this level who left their positions	361	38	206	76	681
Total number of employees of this level who left their position and who had been with the program for longer than a year	169	23	136	50	378
Percent of programs that experienced turnover in each category of staff	77.36%	64.29%	77.59%	56.67%	
Average turnover percentage in programs with turnover	42.93%	54.62%	39.20%	53.84%	
Of the total turnover for staff of this level, the percentage due to the departure of staff who had been with the program longer than one year (turnover from staff with the program longer than one year/total turnover)	46.81%	60.53%	66.02%	65.79%	
Of the programs that experienced turnover, the average percentage due to the departure of staff with the program longer than one year	71.46%	68.98%	68.15%	73.19%	
Salary					
Salary per staff of incumbent staff	\$11.14	\$14.74	\$20.67	\$23.75	
Salary per staff of new hires	\$11.03	\$13.34	\$18.08	\$23.49	
Percent Difference in Salary of new staff paid versus incumbent staff	0.99%	10.45%	14.32%	1.12%	

* Number may not add correctly because of rounding

the term ‘professional, non-supervisory’ staff (see Appendix A, section C). When reporting the salary for this group, some agencies reported it as three or four different salaries to account for the large disparities between what is paid to the variety of professional employees like CSWs, MDs (Psychiatrists), and PhDs, for example. When this happened, the data for this category was dropped from the statistics about salaries, though the number of employees was included in the aggregate employee statistics.

Another minor problem arose in the units of reporting. In particular, some agencies reported staff salaries in varying units of yearly/hourly salary, and each employee/full-time equivalents (FTEs). The former was the main problem. In the few cases where yearly salaries were reported, the figure was converted to an hourly wage based on the assumption of a 40-hour week and a 52-week year.

There were only two instances where employees were reported as FTEs. In this case, follow-up revealed the full number of em-

ployees as well as the per-hour salaries they earned. Although these workers differed significantly from others in that they were part-time, the intent of the survey had been to catalog the salary levels of individuals—whether full- or part-time. Furthermore, from the consumer’s perspective attrition of part-time direct-care staff is still experienced as a disruption in service. For this reason, the number of employees were treated no differently than if full-time staff. In any event, the problem of FTE reporting was with two of the smaller agencies and would likely have had little impact on the outcome whether they were included or not.

The last problem was primarily one of scope. Unfortunately, some agencies reported aggregate data across all discrete programs, while others made copies of the survey form and reported individually for each program. Although on the surface this was problematic it was corrected by weighing the data obtained for each category of staff by the number of staff in that same category. For example, the average salaries for each category of staff were weighed according to the number of staff in the category in order to obtain a weighted average across the entire category. As a result, the figures represent information as experienced both by agencies as well as employees.

The issue of the level of reportage also led to a problem in tracking turnover by agency. For agencies that returned a surveys for each program, we were unable to track turnover of staff leaving one program in a large agency and being hired by another program within the same agency. For such agencies, any attrition would have shown up as ‘agency’ turnover when, in fact, it was only program turnover. Even so, this was assumed to be a small portion of the total.

Conclusion

It is a well-documented fact that the therapeutic relationship between direct care work-

ers and consumers of mental health services is of utmost importance in caring for people who live with mental disabilities. Additionally, the level of experience an individual has working with mental health consumers further increases the quality service. An effective and efficient mental health system should emphasize the development and retention of highly experienced, high quality employees.

Regretfully, the data collected and reported here clearly shows that the level of turnover in mental health agencies across New York State is unacceptably high. Although some turnover in a booming economy is to be expected, the epidemic proportions that currently exist pose a substantial obstacle to the quality of care that agencies are able to provide. In community-based mental health agencies across New York State, turnover ranges from 37% to 54%. Among experienced staff, these numbers are even worse: of those that left, two of three had been with the agency longer than one year. For some categories of staff, as many as three out of four of those who left had been with the agency longer than one year.

Perhaps the most telling evidence for the impact higher salaries may have on turnover and retention rates comes from the comparative data between union and non-union agencies. This data clearly demonstrates that the union agencies have lower turnover, higher ratios of experienced staff, all while providing higher salaries. Although it is conceivably possible that lower turnover rates are related to some other factor not accounted for by our survey, the fact that higher salaries are found in the union agencies in conjunction with lower turnover rates suggests a causality that is stronger than mere chance.

In conclusion, the findings of this survey suggest that the most effective remedy to the problem of high turnover and poor retention of experienced staff in community based mental health agencies would be a significant boost in compensation to direct care staff.