

The Story of Mario

Step 1 Referral, Screening, and Intake

Mario was referred to the torture treatment program by the attorney helping him to file for political asylum. The attorney had grown concerned about Mario's memory gaps related to his prison experience. He also worried because Mario looked increasingly haggard, tearful, and agitated when the attorney asked for details of his persecution. Mario met with a staff person at the torture treatment program who described the program's services and determined Mario was eligible for services. The intake and assessment process began the following week when Mario met with the case manager, Jenna. She began by explaining patient rights and agency procedures to ensure Mario's confidentiality. She also assessed logistics. She provided Mario with bus cards and arranged bus orientation so that he could travel independently to appointments at the torture survivor program and in the community. An intake assessment interview was also conducted with a psychotherapist.

Step 2 Assessment Interviews/Reports

On his first day in the program, Mario met with Luis, a Spanish-speaking psychotherapist, who began to assess Mario's current psychological functioning. In addition to their conversation, Luis explained the purpose of symptom checklists to assess depression, anxiety and post-traumatic symptoms, and administered those in a style encouraging discussion. Mario reported symptoms indicating that he was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and some moderate symptoms of depression. In her meeting with Mario, conducted patiently in English, Jenna assessed for basic needs and social supports. She found he lived with his cousin's family; although he was weary of being a non-contributing guest there, he agreed it was adequate for now. He reported, however, that he was bored, restless, and yet rarely left the house during the day. Mario also met with the treatment program's nurse, Anna. Mario had had no medical care since arriving to the United States and suffered from daily headaches and occasional stomach pain. Anna scheduled him for an appointment at a free medical clinic near his home for a complete physical exam. Mario consented to having copies of his future medical records sent to the torture survivor program. Among Mario's resources and strengths were: (1) his supportive family (both locally and in Columbia), (2) excellent interpersonal skills, (3) basic English comprehension, and (4) good personal insight about his own feelings and reactions to current and past stressors. Mario, Jenna and Luis agreed they would schedule a second meeting to follow up on the issues they had identified, and to give Mario the chance to think more about his vision for healing and ways the program could assist him in this process.

Step 3 Engaging the Community

Jenna saw a number of opportunities to broker a connection between Mario and community resources. For example, Mario's assessment revealed his spiritual faith had always helped him cope with hardship. He confided in Jenna that he yearned to go to church, that he felt anxious because he had been unable to attend Catholic mass or to visit with a priest for spiritual counsel and encouragement. Jenna helped him locate a Catholic parish with Spanish services. The church was located on a bus route, relatively close to his home. Jenna called the church to find worship times and the contact information of the Spanish-speaking pastor. The following week, Mario reported to Luis he felt a little better because of his church visit. Mario explained to Luis it had felt comforted and empowered. Jenna also referred Mario to an English class. Since Mario was unsure of his English, Jenna offered to accompany him to register. In the end, Mario

decided that to preserve his confidentiality, he would go by himself. Because Jenna was familiar with the staff and procedures, she was able to write down for Mario exactly where to go and whom to talk to; several months back, Jenna provided a free training to all of the school's teachers educating them to the reality that their classes may include people who have suffered torture, and suggested approaches to make the environment safe and supportive, even though survivors will not likely self-identify.

Step 4 Formulating and Implementing a Health Care Plan

Before the multidisciplinary care planning meeting, Luis, Anna, and Jenna each prepared a written summary of observations and initial recommendations based on their professional expertise and Mario's expressed needs and desires. Luis also provided input from Mario's immigration attorney, Alexandra. As they conferred regarding priorities for Mario's care, they also looked for possible conflicts among their goals. For example, they didn't want to propose too many activities initially, given the emotional toll the asylum application preparation was taking. Together, the team created a written draft care plan outlining needs, resources, possible goals and proposed interventions for the first six months of services. Jenna reviewed this with Mario during his next visit and made his requested modifications. They agreed on the plan, understanding it could be modified at any time and would be formally reviewed in six months to assess progress and change. The plan proposed Mario be referred initially for psychological and medical evaluations to document the torture and its effects in support of his asylum case, as his attorney had requested. Thereafter, he would meet with Luis, the psychotherapist, weekly at first, with two main goals: identifying and reinforcing his healing resources, both personal and environmental, and reducing his emotional distress, including persistent worry, insomnia, impaired concentration and feelings of humiliation and shame related to torture and its aftermath. Jenna informed Mario about psychiatric services at the center, but he preferred to wait and see if he would be sleeping and feeling better without medication. Mario would also see Jenna weekly. Responding to his distress at feeling overly dependent on his host family, Jenna referred Mario to a local food shelf where he could get groceries to contribute to his cousin's household. Mario also resolved to do more chores around the house to feel better about living there for free. Because he was eager to work, Jenna discussed ways to prepare for work, even while waiting for work permit eligibility. Mario made plans to enroll in an English class and a computer class when he felt ready, and also to look into volunteer opportunities where he could get work experience and a professional reference. Mario met with Anna following his physical exam at the clinic. He learned he had high blood pressure, for which the doctor had prescribed medication. Anna helped him enroll in a local program to help pay for his medications.

Step 5 Multi disciplinary Collaborations

Mario's court date for his asylum hearing is a month away. The lack of asylum has presented chronic stresses over several months. He continues unable to work or receive public benefits. He worries about his wife and children, who remain in Columbia. He fears losing the case and being deported. His work with Luis, his psychotherapist, has helped reduce his depression and isolation, and improve his sleep. Now, the approaching court hearing stimulates memories of the torture and increased nightmares. Mario's attorney, Alexandra, shares with Luis her concern that Mario's anxiety will impair his ability to tell his story at the hearing. Together, they plan an approach where Luis will reinforce his work with relaxation techniques and Alexandra will support Mario to use them during her sessions preparing his testimony. Luis also knows that the preparation of the psychological affidavit already gave Mario the experience of telling his story in detail, so they build on that as they work on relieving the feelings of fear, mistrust and

humiliation that the anticipated court testimony evokes. Mario's primary care doctor had received training in documentation of torture and preparation of an affidavit for immigration court. In documenting medical evidence of Mario's torture, his doctor prepared photographs of Mario's scars along with an affidavit with his professional opinion on their origin. Alexandra assures Mario and Luis that the case is strong and well-documented, which helps Mario manage his anxiety. Meanwhile, Jenna is also aware of the upcoming asylum date. As agreed in the care planning conference, she has supported Mario's request (and Luis' recommendation) to hold off on a referral for volunteer opportunities until Mario has completed his asylum interview. He has, however, been able to start attending English classes a few hours per week, which has helped him feel productive and given him a focus besides his worries. She has monitored his ongoing service at the food shelf, and now helps him get a suit and tie to wear to the hearing. She also makes sure he knows the bus route to the immigration office and the schedule to get there well before the hearing time. She offers a phone call to wake him on time that morning. Mario chooses to consult with his priest and pray in the days leading up to his interview; his confidence to share his situation with his priest has contributed to overcoming shame and isolation as well as providing additional support during this stressful period.