

# 24-hour medication-free treatment wards in Norway

## August 2023

### **Medication-free treatment program at UNN - University Hospital in Northern Norway, Tromsø**

Website in Norwegian: [Medication-free treatment program, Tromsø](#)

The medication-free treatment program is a regional offer provided for Helse Nord at UNN Tromsø for patients 18 years and older with severe mental health issues who would like a medication-free treatment plan. Patients with psychosis or bipolar disorder are given priority. All admissions are voluntary, and it is placed much emphasis on the patient's own motivation for medication-free treatment. Referrals must come from the Specialist Health Care Service. The department is an open ward with 6 places. This serves as an alternative for people who want a course of treatment that highlights a medication-free life, free will, activity, coping mechanisms, structure, network and awareness of their own health and life situation. Patients are given the opportunity to take control of their own improvement process. The program supports the patients' goal of coping without antipsychotic or mood-stabilizing medications. For many, this also means receiving help to gradually reduce medication. The network, relations and recovery perspective shape the basis for all approaches within the program. Attitudes such as equality, free will, co-determination, compassion and respect are key factors.

The treatment program mainly consists of participation in the recovery workshop, physical activity and other activities inside and outside of the ward. Medication-free treatment is individually tailored and involves several different types of health care professionals. The patient shall, as far as possible, contribute to the design of his or her treatment plan. A treatment plan is prepared which describes what the patient wants to work with and what the treatment program should consist of. Medication-free treatment in Tromsø consists of various activities and is offered both in groups and individually. It offers various psychotherapeutic methods, physiotherapy, art therapy, skills training, music therapy and interaction, and mindfulness exercises. The ward collaborates with the patients on many everyday tasks so that everyone can participate and contribute to how the ward should be.

There is no fixed duration of the treatment program. This is assessed individually and is decided in collaboration with the person concerned and the network around the individual. The most common, however, is to be hospitalized for 1-3 weeks and return 4-6 times a year. Some patients go home on leave on the weekends, but most choose to stay at the ward during the weekend. For those who have a long journey, it is not relevant to go home on leave.

Medication-free treatment is always part of the treatment plan in a treatment network, where collaboration within the network is a core focus. In addition, work with private networks and family is central. An important part of the treatment may for some be to prepare a detailed plan for overcoming crisis, where various potential challenges and danger signals, as well as different coping strategies and support persons are listed.

## **Medication-free treatment program at DPS Vegsund, Ålesund, Helse Møre and Romsdal**

Website in Norwegian: [Medication-free treatment program, DPS Vegsund, Ålesund](#)

The medication-free treatment program at DPS Vegsund is a regional offer for Helse Midt-Norge. The target group is people with various anxiety disorders, depression or personality problems, who have several previous treatment attempts. The department has 6 places; 3 24-hour places and 3 places reserved for day patients. The department offers non-medical treatment methods that have a documented effect on patients with long-term and complex problems.

The program consists of an 8-week emotion-focused treatment where ISTDP (Intensive Short-Term Dynamic Psychotherapy) offers a theoretical structure, both in relation to understanding pathology and change. In ISTDP, the therapist works to identify the link between unconscious emotions, anxiety, defense, and the difficulties the patient is seeking therapy for. The treatment is both individual and group-based, where a holistic approach and treatment of the individual is highlighted. The department offers; Psychotherapy, psychoeducation, mindfulness, body awareness, environmental therapy, music therapy, therapeutic yoga, exercise, outdoor activities and group therapy.

## **24-hour medication-free ward, DPS Nedre Romerike**

Website in Norwegian: [24-hour medication-free ward, DPS Nedre Romerike](#)

Medication-free treatment is an offer for patients over the age of 18 in mental health care who have traditionally previously been treated with medication. The medication-free 24-hour unit offers a program with recovery as a treatment platform. A core value in recovery is the belief that despite mental difficulties you can have a good and meaningful everyday life. The health practitioner and patient are seen as equal partners towards the patient's goals. The patient is an expert on their own needs and the therapist is an expert in a professional aspect. The goal is to have sufficient knowledge, skills, network and support to take responsibility for their own choices and their own life.

The ward has a 24-hour unit with 7 beds. The program consists of an 8-week intensive treatment plan composed of several medication-free treatments with a fixed program on weekdays and leave on weekends. The following forms of treatment are included: Environmental therapy, physical activity, art and expression therapy, body awareness group, evaluation meetings, relaxation group, individual counseling and group activities. The program is a structured and targeted treatment plan, which is based on the participant's personal goals, dissemination of knowledge, personal efforts and mutual cooperation. The program has interdisciplinary committed staff consisting of environmental therapists, physiotherapist, social worker, psychiatrist, psychologist, chefs, janitor and secretaries.

**Hurdalsjøen Recovery Center, Recovery Academy, Hurdal – Closed down March 31st 2023**  
**Website in Norwegian: [Hurdalsjøen Recovery Center, Recovery Academy, Hurdal](#)**

The recovery clinic has a Specialist Health Care Service that offers recovery-oriented medication-free treatment where it is possible to receive help for medication reduction. The recovery clinic consists of 3 main pillars: IMR, healthy diet and structured physical activity, such as outdoor field trips, exercise, yoga and ball games. The clinic has a competent interdisciplinary group of employees. The professional in charge is a psychologist or psychiatrist, and the main focus of the treatment is life mastery skills. The core of the treatment philosophy ensures that all employees work to support each individual participant in the process on the way to their personal recovery goals with the help of IMR (Illness Management & Recovery). IMR is a structured and knowledge-based treatment program of recovery and life mastery. The treatment program will help people with mental health problems to develop personal and life coping strategies and to get in touch with their own resources. The method uses motivational techniques with pedagogical and cognitive strategies consisting of 11 modules with different topics. It takes 10-12 weeks to complete the IMR modules:

- Module 1: Individual mastery and recovery, including personal goals
- Module 2: Useful facts about mental illness
- Module 3: Useful facts about substance abuse disorders
- Module 4: The Stress Vulnerability Model
- Module 5: Coping with stress
- Module 6: Building social support
- Module 7: Effective use of medication (Hurdalsjøen Recovery Center works with local adaptation, for medical reduction to also be included)
- Module 8: Master persistent symptoms
- Module 9: Healthy lifestyle
- Module 10: Create a plan to prevent relapse (Service plan)
- Module 11: Receive help for your needs in the Norwegian health service or other service providers

The Recovery Academy focuses on facilitating meaningful activity and work. The supervisor assists, among other things, with contact with NAV for relevant jobs and inclusion.

**BET-unit Blakstad, Vestre Viken**

(developed and established unrelated to the authorities' requirements for drug-free units)

Website in Norwegian: [BET-unit Blakstad, Vestre Viken](#)

The BET model was developed in the 1990s by the Psychology Specialist Didrik Heggdal.

The unit offers intensive inpatient treatment for people with extensive mental health challenges who have not benefited from the ordinary mental health care treatment programs in the Specialist Health Care Service. BET (Basal Exposure Therapy) facilitates, promotes and supports the human ability to live an independent and qualitatively good life. Based on your own values, you will be able to learn to handle and relate to your mental health challenges in an appropriate way. Everyone who comes to the unit is offered BET as medical-free treatment if they wish.

## **Medication-free treatment, DPS Lister Kvinesdal, Agder - Closed down 2023**

Website in Norwegian: [Medication-free treatment, DPS Lister Kvinesdal, Agder](#)

The program offers an 8-week treatment plan with a recovery treatment platform. During the stay, you have a break of 2 weeks to test acquired knowledge at home. A core value in recovery is the belief that despite mental difficulties you can have a good and meaningful everyday life. The health practitioner and patient are seen as equal partners towards the patient's goals. The patient is an expert on their own needs and the therapist is an expert in a professional aspect. The goal is to have sufficient knowledge, skills, network and support to take responsibility for their own choices and their own life. The treatment plan also consists of a program that includes physical activity and exercise. A good diet and maintaining a social network and function in daily life are also central.

Medication-free treatment means that the patients themselves are the key player in their own treatment plan. The program is based on the perspective "Recovery" which means that you will get help to achieve your own goals, have good knowledge of your own illness, experience having control and master your own life.

Medication-free treatment options are for people with mental disorders who want treatment without a focus on medication. People with depression, sleep problems, anxiety and medication addiction will be given priority, but others who want a medication-free treatment plan can also apply. The medication-free program has 8 places, of which 4 are outpatient and 4 are 24-hour places.

Cognitive therapy and networking are core elements of the treatment. The program is a structured and targeted treatment offer, which is based on the participant's personal goals, own efforts and resources. The treatment plan can include: Daily recovery group, conversation group, lectures, outdoor therapy, targeted activities within the community, environmental therapy, cognitive-oriented conversations, network and collaboration meetings, exercise, dietary and sleep guidance.

## **Medication-free 24-hour treatment in an ordinary District Psychiatric Center ward**

### **Medication-free treatment at Haldenklubben, DPS Halden-Sarpsborg**

Website in Norwegian: [Medication-free treatment at Haldenklubben, DPS Halden-Sarpsborg](#)

The program is based on an environmental therapeutic follow-up, individually adapted in collaboration between patient and staff. The clinic offers:

An individual weekly plan prepared on the basis of the unit's environmental therapeutic program.

Focus on circadian rhythm and structure; Sleep, rest, activity.

Physical activity (walks, field trips and exercise in a gym with a physiotherapist)

Psychomotor physiotherapy - individual guidance if needed

NADA (ear acupuncture, to aid sleep and anxiety/restlessness)

Orange glasses (for hypomanic phases, for reduction of unwanted blue light stimuli)

Food and Dietary Guidance (Clinical Nutritionist)

General education about the most common mental symptoms - in groups and/or individually

Wellness room (various equipment for sensory stimulation or reduction of sensory impressions)

Psychoeducation (sleep hygiene, anxiety/depression, psychosis) adapted to the patient's problems.  
Music (music therapy; group/individual)  
Social community as a training and well-being arena.  
Group activities.  
Social skills training and coping strategies - group and individual.  
Individual therapist counseling.  
Family work; Conversations with relatives - possible start-up of a family group.

Environmental therapy is fundamental in a 24-hour unit. The treatment should lead to symptom relief, better quality of life and improved functioning. It involves an adapted framework and structure for sleep, activity, rest, diet and social activities. The content of environmental therapy is for example a joint weekly program with group activities such as physical activity, coping group, mental symptoms lecture, IMR group, music therapy, cognitive group, hiking group and other common social activities. IMR is a method that emphasizes learning about mental disorders in order to make informed decisions about one's own treatment, as well as helping people set personal goals and find strategies for achieving these in everyday life. The clinic has sensory rooms that can be used based on individual needs, with particular emphasis on reducing unwanted symptoms and increasing the feeling of well-being. NADA (ear acupuncture) is also offered to reduce anxiety, restlessness and better sleep quality. All patients have a responsible therapist, either a doctor or a psychologist. Somatic state of health and a plan for phasing out antipsychotic or mood-stabilizing medication are always followed up by a doctor.

The clinic works Recovery-oriented, which means that the therapist and the patient focus on the individual's resources and personal goals. To become an expert on one's own suffering, have hope and faith in being able to master life and everyday life despite challenges. The follow-up of patients takes place both individually and in groups based on the individual's needs. The clinic collaborates with relatives, and all relevant partners as needed, such as the municipal health service, workplace and school. The staff works interdisciplinary and is composed of psychiatrists, doctors, psychologists, nurses, social workers, health professionals, physiotherapists, nutritionists and music therapists.