

Primary
Care



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COMMON PRACTICE

The Psychiatry Gap

The Primary Care Collaborative has a goal of Patient Centered Medical Home in four clinics this year. We will be transforming care by trying to create a comprehensive and accessible approach for all patients. We will be utilizing telehealth and other psychiatric resources to help accomplish this. Mental health services will be integral to our success.

In Mississippi, 725,000 individuals suffer from a mental illness. With 25 percent of the population suffering from major depression, an anxiety disorder, alcohol/drug dependency or a severe mental illness, we need to begin taking necessary steps to "fill the gaps" existing in these patients' care.

Where Are the Psychiatrists?

The American Board of Psychiatry recommends one psychiatrist per every 10,000 adults in a service area. Mississippi currently has five psychiatrists per every 100,000 adults, and those are predominantly placed in urban areas. Those living in rural areas may have to drive several hours to the nearest psychiatrist or psychiatric treatment facility. Psychiatrists are sometimes called "a dying breed" as more than 70 percent of those in the profession are over age 50 and will soon contemplate retirement. Medical schools have seen a massive decline in students interested in psychiatry because of several factors, including low compensation (driven by low reimbursement), strict documentation requirements, administrative cost associated with insurance plans, complicated disease processes, marginal respect within the medical community and guarded patient outcomes.

Psychiatric Consultations

With several specialists on staff, many hospitals are able to acquire input from several medical professionals before making a key decision in a patient's care. Rural hospitals seldom have the luxury of consulting with specialists in regard to their patient and are accustomed to making decisions on their own. However, with the introduction of telehealth, consulting with specialists about complex patients will become the norm. Psychiatry, in particular, will be able to assist hospitalists with medication management and help rule out symptoms caused by particular medications

in the search for an accurate diagnosis.

Comorbidity

When 68 percent of adults with mental disorders have medical conditions and 29 percent of adults with medical conditions have mental disorders, you can see a pattern. Comorbid patients, once the exception to the rule, have now become the rule itself. A study conducted at North Mississippi Medical Center, based on 363 admissions, found 419 psychiatric diagnoses. Many patients had several diagnoses with depression and anxiety being at the very top of the list. Of the 363 admissions, 120 (33 percent) were readmitted within 60 days.

As you may already know, these comorbid patients are complex and require a number of resources to treat. Depending on the patients' insurance, with 61 percent being made up by Medicaid, we may or may not be paid for treatment/resources. Keeping comorbid patients healthy both mentally and physically is the No. 1 priority, and building a collaborative network of care is the answer to making that successful.

Depression Screening for CABG Patients

As many as 65 percent of patients experience depression or anxiety for three weeks after open heart surgery. As many as 29 percent will still be depressed 12 weeks after surgery. Depression/anxiety in these individuals can stall healing, increase chances of mortality and affect quality of life. Administering the PHQ-2, a depression screening test, post-surgery can aid in identifying those individuals who may need a psychiatric consultation while still hospitalized. With appropriate medication management, these individuals will be able to better focus on healing and living life once again.

Telehealth Clinic Management

To address the shortage of psychiatrists, especially in rural areas, telehealth brings the specialty provider to the community clinic. The benefits of telehealth are many and include:

- See a specialty provider from your community
- Schedule your appointment sooner
- Save time, transportation, and childcare costs needed to access an appointment far away
- Eliminate the need to miss work
- Experience patient privacy and confidentiality
- Experience equivalent to in-person care in diagnostic accuracy, treatment effectiveness, quality of care and patient satisfaction

Specifically, for mental health, the patient avoids the stigma still associated with seeking care for a mental illness. When the patient presents to the clinic, only the patient and the nurse are aware of the purpose of the visit and others may only think they are there for a routine checkup.

These initiatives are only the beginning to bridging the gap for our patients.

Your assistance is vital in helping identify those patients who could benefit from psychiatric services and helping those same patients realize a psychiatric diagnosis resembles any other medical diagnosis in that it is treatable with the correct care.

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