Increasing Access to Community Support Groups for Patients with Mental Health Needs: A Guide for Primary Care Physicians

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INCREASING ACCESS TO COMMUNITY SUPPORT GROUPS FOR PATIENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS – A GUIDE FOR PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS

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THE PROBLEM

• A LARGE PERCENTAGE OF PATIENTS SEEN BY PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS SUFFER FROM MENTAL HEALTH AFFLICTIONS THAT ARE REQUIRING INCREASINGLY MORE TIME AND RESOURCES TO TREAT.

• THERE IS A LACK OF MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY WHICH RESULT IN 3-6 MONTH WAITING PERIODS FOR PATIENTS TO GET AN APPOINTMENT WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS. MORE MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES ARE NEEDED TO HELP FAMILY PRACTITIONERS ADDRESS THIS PROBLEM.
PUBLIC HEALTH COST

- Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting roughly 40 million adults, and the U.S. spends about $42 billion on treating them. About half of that cost is associated with repeated use of health care services, most often primary care services.

- Only about 1/3 of those suffering from anxiety disorders receive treatment.

- Depression is also a prevalent disorder in the general population and costs the U.S. alone $43.7 billion. Of that total amount, 28% is attributable to direct costs, 17% comprises mortality costs, and 55% is derived from comorbidity costs.

- Depressed patients can comprise up to 10% of the patient population seen by primary care practitioners, also have an increased risk for cardiac mortality, diabetes-specific complications, and other medical complications.
COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

“WE JUST HIRED A PSYCHIATRIC NURSE PRACTITIONER AND HER PATIENT LOAD IS ALREADY SO FULL THAT IT TAKES 3 MONTHS FOR A PATIENT TO SCHEDULE A NEW APPOINTMENT WITH HER.”

- DR. [NAME WITHHELD]

“THERE IS SUCH A SHORTAGE OF MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES FOR PATIENTS THAT COME TO THE CLINIC, ANYTHING THAT COULD BE DONE TO HELP ACCOMMODATE THOSE NEEDS WOULD BE INCREDIBLY USEFUL.”

- [NAME WITHHELD], LICSW

“ONE OF THE MOST HELPFUL THINGS WE’VE DONE AT THE CLINIC IS TRY TO INTEGRATE MENTAL HEALTH INTO PRIMARY CARE BY HIRING A PSYCHIATRIST TO COME TO THE CLINIC. THAT SERVICE HAS BEEN INCREDIBLY HELPFUL, BUT IT’S STILL NOT ENOUGH.”

- DR. [NAME WITHHELD]
INTERVENTION AND METHODOLOGY

1. I researched local support groups that are offered throughout Chittenden County and Northern Vermont. I ensured that the support groups were free to attend, and still active, as many that were listed had since dissolved.

2. I compiled a pamphlet with times, dates, and contact information for those support groups as well as a list of resources that health care providers can print out from their EMR and give to patients with mental health needs.

This should reduce the time it takes for patients to get connected with therapeutic resources and get the help they need.
RESULTS / RESPONSE

• HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS WERE PLEASED TO SEE THAT IMMEDIATE RESOURCES WERE AVAILABLE TO HELP WITH THE MENTAL HEALTH DEMANDS OF THE COMMUNITY.

• PATIENT RESPONSES HAVE NOT BEEN ANALYZED AT THIS POINT.

• CONTINUE TO FOLLOW UP WITH PATIENTS WHO HAVE ATTENDED THE SUPPORT GROUPS TO SEE IF THEY ARE HELPING.
EFFECTIVENESS AND LIMITATIONS

• SEVERAL METHODS FOR EVALUATING EFFECTIVENESS
  • 1. QUALITATIVE: CONTINUE TO FOLLOW UP WITH PATIENTS WHO HAVE ATTENDED THESE SUPPORT GROUPS TO ASSESS THEIR EFFICACY.
  • 2. QUANTITATIVE: MEASURE THE NUMBER OF HEALTH CARE VISITS THAT OCCUR BECAUSE OF MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS AND SEE HOW THAT NUMBER HAS CHANGED AFTER PATIENTS HAVE STARTED USING THIS RESOURCE.

• LIMITATIONS
  • SINCE THESE GROUPS ARE OFTEN RUN ON A VOLUNTEER BASIS, SOME DISSOLVE FOR UNKNOWN REASONS WHICH CAUSES A LOT OF FLUCTUATION IN AVAILABLE RESOURCES AND GROUPS.
FUTURE INTERVENTIONS

1. Create a method that keeps this information current as often as possible. I discovered that many of the support groups were no longer occurring or had changed locations.

2. Create a support group that runs out the Thomas Chittenden Health Center, since it is the primary location where patients receive their health care.

3. Compile a “take-home” packet of CBT exercises that patients can work on at home to help them with anxiety and/or depression.
REFERENCES

• ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA


• GOOGLE – FOR IMAGES