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Using Relief From Mental Health Symptoms as Motivation for Exercise and Lifestyle Changes. Brookfield Family Medicine, CT

Nicholas Selig
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Problem Identification

• There is a high prevalence of mental illness, mostly anxiety, depression and insomnia, within the Brookfield community.

• These are often comorbid with metabolic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and hyperlipidemia as well as chronic pain syndromes like fibromyalgia and lower back pain.

• The benefits of exercise on the symptoms of mental illness has been well established [1-3,6].

• Unfortunately there is a lack of motivation and knowledge among patients concerning exercise’s benefits for various health concerns.
Public Health Costs

• The public health cost of mental health disease is well recognized.
  • “In 2010, mental and substance use disorders constituted 10.4% of the global burden of disease and were the leading cause of years lived with disability among all disease groups” [5]
  • “In 2006, health care costs reached 16% of the nation’s gross domestic product, on a path to reach 20% by 2016. While mental disorders contribute to these costs at an estimated 6.2% of the nation’s spending on health care.” [4]
Community Perspective

• Primary care providers try to encourage healthy lifestyle changes for their patients:
  • “I try to keep them working, exercising, getting fresh air, sunshine, sleeping at normal time and get involved in one activity where they will make social connections.” –Jennifer Ober APRN

• However there is a perceived lack of motivation among the mental health patients to make healthy lifestyle choices.
  • “Most people feel better from exercise and therapy, but they have to do it. You can lead the horse to water but you can’t make them drink” – Anonymous Provider #1
Intervention and Methodology

• A one page flyer was made for patient education about the benefits of exercise for the symptoms of insomnia, depression and anxiety. The flyer also contained information about WCNH’s available free vouchers for online CBT courses.

• These were made available to patients in the waiting room of Brookfield family medicine, and for providers to distribute to their patient’s as needed.
Results and Response

• The providers in the office were enthused to have access to a document that they could give to their patients. Especially if they didn’t have time during the current visit to discuss the benefits of exercise with the patient.

• “This will be a very useful document and it is a great project that helps us focus patients on something they can do for themselves – and it's free.” – Dr. Cornelius Ferrreira
Effectiveness and Limitations

• The benefits are:
  • It is free and it is something the patients can read and implement at their own pace.
  • It gives steps that patient’s can take on their own without input form providers or other health professionals.
  • It is something the providers can give to their patients to get them started.

• The limitations are:
  • It is not customized to the individual patient’s circumstances and obstacles to change.
  • It does not have the motivational aspect of a provider talking the patient through the steps to change and the motivational factor that provides.
Recommendations for Future

• This project demonstrated a desire in providers to see their patient’s make better lifestyle decisions. To achieve that goal future steps may include:
  • Imbedding these recommendations in the practice’s EMR templates to allow physician to reference them before and during visits. This may encourage physicians to have discussions with patents about their lifestyle choices more often.
  • Allowing patients to record their lifestyle habits on the patient portal. This would be accessible to the patients and their providers so they can see the progress they are making, as well as areas where they can improve. This may help provider personalize recommendations.
  • Involve community resources such as local gyms to help remove obstacles, such as cost or transportation, to patients making healthy lifestyle choices such as exercise.
References