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Recommended Citation

Braddick, Valerie, "Increasing Mental Health Resource Access During the COVID-19 Pandemic" (2022).

Family Medicine Clerkship Student Projects. 736.

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Increasing Mental Health Resource Access During the COVID-19 Pandemic

VAL BRADDICK, MS3

PLATTSBURGH, NY

FAMILY MEDICINE COMMUNITY PROJECT

MENTOR: DR. MAEGAN CABRERA, MD

What's the Problem?

Why do we need to address it?

- Mental health disorders are some of the most undertreated conditions in our country, and yet have such a large impact on our society
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, prevalence of mental health concerns has increased even further
- Despite the high demand, there are significant barriers to starting mental health care, some of which include:
 - 1. Stigma
 - 2. Patient are unsure of where to get help
 - 3. Demand > Supply
- Primary care offices provide the best environment within healthcare for disseminating mental health resources, as most patients that are seeking / need additional help do not see psychiatrists or psychologists.

Public Health Costs

- Statistics from 2019 indicate that mental health costs were \$225 billion in 2019 (Open Minds Market Intelligence Report), which is far less compared to treatment for other medical disease
- Untreated mental illness costs more than \$100 billion per year in lost productivity (NAMI)
- Costs to our society are significant, as untreated mental health concerns can lead to:
 - Inability to hold a job and support oneself
 - Suicide
 - Substance abuse and crime
 - Isolation
 - Strained family ties
 - The list goes on...

Community Perspective and Support (Interviews)

1. Dr. Aubrey Wheeler M.D., Family Medicine Physician in Plattsburgh, NY

“The need for mental health treatment is incredibly high, it’s almost so high that a lot of what we do is triaging who needs it most, and almost everybody needs it. With the pandemic in particular, things are quite stressful, and there are so many barriers to care.”

2. Anonymous Patient, Family Medicine Practice in Plattsburgh, NY

“I think that a lot of people just don’t know where to look to get help for their depression and anxiety, and for me it took a very long time to even admit that I was struggling with those problems. When I finally mentioned it to my PCP after many years, I was surprised at how many resources were out there that I just didn’t know about. I think if we can make that information more readily available to folks in the community, we would probably all be a lot better off.”

Intervention & Methodology

- I created an EPIC smart phrase that can be used by physicians with a list of both general and local resources for mental health concerns. Physicians and patients alike believed that this would be the most efficient way to disseminate information.
- I collected data from both physicians and patients in the community regarding their opinion about the need for mental health information dissemination, as well as which resources they have found most helpful.
 - Interview questions included:
 - How do you think the need for access to mental health resources has changed since the pandemic?
 - What have you found to be the best local resources for mental health treatment?
 - How do you suggest we begin to ameliorate the lack of access to behavioral health treatment?
- Throughout the process, I gained insight into just how prevalent mental health disorders are specifically in Plattsburgh, a community of lower socioeconomic status compared to Burlington, VT.
- By engaging with community organizations, I think greater ties will be formed between the family medicine practice and mental health treatment centers, enabling easier referrals and access to care.

Results/Response & Data/Results

- The EPIC smart phrase includes:
 - Links to free youtube meditation videos
 - A list of smartphone apps, including: Insight Timer, Headspace, PTSD Coach, Better Help, ReGain, Faithful Counseling, Talk Space, CBT Thought Diary
 - Local psych referrals, including:
 - Clinton County Mental Health (CCMH)
 - Behavioral Health Services North (BHSN)
 - North Star Behavioral Health Services
 - Individual psychiatrists in the area

Effectiveness & Limitations

- Effectiveness can be evaluated by patient survey / interviews at their next doctor's visit, specifically addressing:
 - How satisfied were you with the resources you were provided?
 - Did you reach out to any of the resources?
 - Are you currently utilizing help from any of the resources?
 - What additional information would be helpful for your doctor to provide?
- Limitations:
 - Cost– some resources may not be affordable
 - Stigma– although providing resources helps address some of the barriers to care, stigma remains a large one
 - Inconsistent doctor's visits / use of healthcare

Future Projects and Recommendations

- Having an in-house psychologist and/or psychiatrist that can discuss mental health concerns and provide both encouragement and further resources for care
- Continue to expand and revise the resource list based on both patient and provider feedback
- Continue to normalize mental health concerns, especially in the current landscape of COVID-19
- Using this smart phrase as a model for other communities to disseminate information

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National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Website: www.nami.org

CDC Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/access.html>

Consent Forms

Yes /

Name: Dr. Aubrey Wheeler, MD

Name:

Yes /

Name: Anonymous Patient #8

Name: