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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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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.
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 of 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