

THE ADVANTAGES OF PROVIDING PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES IN FAMILY PRACTICE



“We raise each other’s skillset. I learn more about medicine every day and you learn more about mental health every day and it’s enhancing both of our skillsets.”

Alexa Connell, PhD
Psychologist, Assistant Director, Center for Integrated Primary Care, UMass Medical School

PRIMARY CARE AND COMMON MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Identifying and treating mood, anxiety, and substance abuse disorders early and addressing psychosocial stressors and health behaviors are increasingly recognized as keys to improving the overall health and well-being of our nation.

- One in four adults in the U.S. will struggle with a mental health issue in a given year.
- Nearly 40% of premature deaths in the U.S. are due to unhealthy behaviors.
- There is a high concurrence of mental/behavioral health problems and physical disorders such as diabetes, elevated cholesterol, asthma, and obesity.
- Co-occurrence of mental illness with a chronic illness worsens a patient’s health outcomes.
- Both depression and anxiety are effectively treated with brief evidence-based therapy.

THE ROLE OF FAMILY PRACTICE PROVIDERS IN MENTAL HEALTH

Treatment of mental health issues across the lifespan is increasingly provided by family physicians.

- Nearly two thirds of those who need mental health or substance use treatment are first seen in general medical settings.
- Family physicians have taken on greater roles in mental health services but may lack the time and skills to fully address the patient’s social and emotional needs.
- Despite these efforts, mental health problems are underdiagnosed.
- Well-intentioned physicians can disrupt their patient schedules when addressing a mental health concern in an extended visit.
- Referral for mental health assessment and treatment may result in frustration due to inadequate communication between primary care and mental health systems.
- When patients are referred to an external mental health provider, less than half follow through on the referral.

Roles of Primary Care Clinicians in Mental Health Services



Mental and behavioral health are essential to overall health and cannot be separated. Primary care offices provide an opportunity to promote social and emotional well-being. Given the complexities of addressing whole-person health concerns, new models of integrating behavioral health and mental health services into primary care have emerged. These models include:

- Training family physicians to identify mental health disorders
- Consultation by mental health providers to primary care providers
- Integration of mental health providers within family medicine practices

Studies indicate that high-quality mental health services located in family practices are multidisciplinary, collaborative, and more effective than traditional services.

The advantages of integrating mental health providers in family practice settings include:

- Increased confidence among family physicians to explore mental health concerns
- Availability of resources for consultation and collective decision making
- Less stigma for those seeking mental health care
- Improved patient satisfaction with the range of services available in the practice

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BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INCLUDES:



Healthy and Unhealthy Behaviors: activity, stress, diet, medication adherence, and more



Mental Health: psychological distress, depression, and anxiety to severe and persistent mental illness



Substance Use and Abuse: smoking, using drugs, alcohol dependence



- Interested in APA's **Psychologists in Integrated Health Care** video series or more information on integrated health care?

Please contact:

W. Doug Tynan, PhD, Director of Integrated Health Care and Associate Director of APA's Center for Psychology and Health
dtynan@apa.org | 202-336-5884 | www.apa.org/health

- Want to locate a psychologist in your area?

Contact your state psychological association: <http://www.apa.org/about/apa/organizations/associations.aspx>

Check out the APA Practice Organization's **Psychologist Locator**: <http://locator.apa.org>

- The **APA Psychology Help Center** is an online resource for your patients featuring information about psychological issues affecting physical and emotional well-being: <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter>

- Sources for the facts in this document can be found on the APA website at <http://www.apa.org/health/family-practice.aspx>

UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS OF PSYCHOLOGISTS TO ADULT PRIMARY CARE TEAMS

Psychologists are uniquely equipped to be an integral part of primary care practices. They can:

- administer and interpret screening and/or assessment tools to identify a mental health problem;
- offer therapy for substance abuse and unhealthy behavioral concerns that arise in a visit;
- coordinate care with schools, employee assistance programs, disability offices, and other agencies;
- train health care teams in motivational interviewing and other strategies;
- offer expertise in assessing the programs implemented;
- collaborate with psychiatry, social work, nursing, health coaches, and community health workers.

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