I am Behavioral Health.

Why would a healthcare system invest in Behavioral Health while others are closing their doors?

Carolinas HealthCare System has gone against the tide and embraced behavioral health. By launching Mental Health First Aid, innovating virtual primary care integration, providing ER telepsych consults, answering 200,000 behavioral health calls annually and opening a new $36 million dollar facility all demonstrates commitment.

Behavioral Health Call Center, Carolinas HealthCare System

Alischa Rodgers is a telemental health clinician in the call center. It’s her job to connect patients to resources and services, provide emotional support to callers and assist people in the throes of crisis. The call center’s licensed clinicians answered more than 14,500 calls during the month of July, breaking a call volume record for 2015. Out of those calls, more than 94 percent were answered within 18 seconds.

Centralized Behavioral Health Patient Placement

Linda Thomas, RN, was tasked with determining how long the average behavioral health patient waited in the EDs for a bed. North Carolina has double the national rate of behavioral health ED visits. Carolinas HealthCare System is expanding capacity and coordinating inpatient bed management and transport across the system. The System initiated a centralized patient placement program, linked with a behavioral health patient transport system, across the EDs in the Charlotte metropolitan area, with plans to expand across the entire System.

Behavioral Health Virtual Care

Wayne Sparks, MD, medical director of telepsychiatry, was one of the first adopters of telemedicine within the System. Carolinas HealthCare System has implemented virtual care across the behavioral health continuum. We expect virtual visits to help the system achieve the “triple aim”: lower costs, improved access and a better patient experience. ED consults through telepsychiatry were the system’s first foray into virtual care. Today, the System conducts 250 or more of these consultations per month just in the greater Charlotte area.

Primary Care Integration

Manuel Castro, MD, medical director of behavioral health integration, believes most of the time patients with behavioral health needs can be treated effectively right in their primary care doctor’s office. We are reconfiguring the IMPACT integration model: instead of embedding a single behavioral health provider in a primary care setting, Carolinas HealthCare System will deploy a virtual team of providers — social workers, nurses, PharmDs, care navigators, psychiatrists —working at the top of their licenses to meet patient needs across the system.

Peer Support Specialist

One of our very own peer support specialists, Joe Swafford, addressed our System’s Leadership Institute to discuss the importance of mental health awareness. His opening message to 1,500 leaders was this:

“Let me tell you who I am, what I am... You’re afraid of me. You don’t know how to handle me. You don’t know how to deal with me. I frustrate you. You don’t have the systems to deal with me... I’m mental health.”