Addressing a Gap in Health Care Workers’ Understanding of Person-Centered Care through Collaboration with Community Agencies

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Background

- Community mental health agencies offer broad services, spanning from medication management for mental health disorders, primary care, some vision and dental care, substance use treatment, and case management;
- Agencies often provide services for underserved populations;
- Physicians have an ambiguous understanding of the importance and totality of these agencies; yet, demonstrate keen interest in wanting to mitigate social determinants of health and take action to improve person-centered care and community health.

Objectives

- Address a practice gap in resident physicians’ understanding of social determinants of health and available services for patients with mental illness;
- Promote person-centered care by providing appropriate community linkage and resources to patients following psychiatric hospitalization;
- Improve population health and person-centered care by encouraging collaboration between academic and community entities.

Actions Taken

- Received education about social determinants of mental health and referral sites for populations seeking adult inpatient psychiatric services;
- Toured community mental health agencies, a substance use treatment center, and a peer support center;
- Met with and learned from field workers and agency leadership about services offered;
- Attended team meetings to appreciate how interdisciplinary community care plans are developed and implemented;
- Interacted with patients to gain perspectives on their experiences at each agency.

These educational initiatives were undertaken to bridge this gap between referring physicians and community mental health agencies.

Feedback Results

- Development of field experiences emerged from recognition of the gaps in new trainees’ knowledge of available community services;
- Trainees had the opportunity to tour and gain knowledge of the breadth of services provided by area agencies;
- Trainees agreed or strongly agreed that the experiences valuably contributed to their understanding of local agencies and ability to explain their services to patients;
- After the experience, all trainees strongly agreed that they were more likely to refer patients to agencies.

Recognition of future opportunities to improve person-centered care and population health have been identified and collaborative projects, including nutrition programs, are in process.