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TECHNOLOGY BRINGS MENTAL HEALTH CARE TO PATIENTS FAR AND WIDE

BY FAIRVIEW HEALTH SERVICES • 3 MONTHS AGO • FAIRVIEW PROVIDERS

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With mental illness affecting 1 in 5 Americans every year, too many people—estimates say 91 million—have limited access to services that can help.

An innovative use of technology is helping providers at Fairview, and beyond, bring mental health services to patients in need, no matter where they live.

Telehealth solves care delivery puzzle

Behavioral Healthcare Providers (BHP), a wholly owned subsidiary of Fairview, is using internet video technology—or telehealth—to increase access to mental health services. Along with a network of more than 5,000 providers, BHP provides care assessments for patients in a mental health crisis. Their telehealth services are helping providers solve a common dilemma in care delivery.

Patients in a behavioral health crisis typically turn to their local hospital’s emergency department (ED) for care. Most critical access hospitals, however, have few beds and their ED doctors have little experience or training in mental health care. Having a mental health professional available to the ED at any time, however, isn’t usually a viable option for a small or rural medical center.

With BHP’s telehealth, mental health services are available to health care sites of any size, throughout the state, on a 24-7 basis. Providers and patients connect by video conference call with a licensed mental health professional, giving patients the same information and care they would receive from an in-person assessment.

“With telehealth, we saw that one provider can see people at Fairview Lakes or Fairview Northland or any other hospital that couldn’t provide mental health support before,” says Nicole Bauer, BHP account manager. “The patients are happy and the providers are thrilled, so we’re hoping to bring it to more locations.”

Help beyond Fairview hospitals

BHP’s telehealth services are growing, with 4,000 assessments completed in the last four years throughout Minnesota, including patients at sites outside the Fairview system.

Using BHP’s telehealth services has helped the ED at Glencoe Regional Health Services improve their patient care while making better use of their inpatient resources. Now patients who come to the ED in crisis can get both the medical and mental health care they need.

“This telehealth system is a game changer. It allows smaller hospitals to deliver the expert services that rural patients and their families need,” says Mitchell Palmer, MD, Glencoe Regional Health Services emergency department medical director.

In the next few months, BHP's telehealth services will launch in a number of communities throughout Minnesota—from Onamia and Albert Lea and Red Wing to St. James—increasing mental health care access at 20 locations statewide.

"Patients just want to be heard, no matter the method," says Sally Olson, business development director at BHP. "With telehealth, there's no reason smaller hospitals can't have behavioral health resources available to them. We have to do this for the patients, and now we're able to help them sooner rather than later, wherever they are."

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