Washington Association for Community Health

CHC Community Health Center OF SNOHOMISH COUNTY

PROMISING PRACTICES

Community Health Center of Snohomish County Shares Promising Practice: Behavioral Health Triage Clinician, a key role in the fight against burn-out among Mental Health Providers.

During the pandemic four years ago, an influx of behavioral health cases made it incredibly challenging for the Behavioral Health Provider to maintain a full schedule of providing patients care while simultaneously remaining available for crisis calls/situations. After analyzing the situation, the Community Health Center of Snohomish County (CHC) created a new position, Behavioral Health (BH) Triage Clinician, to lessen the load of their BH provider. CHC also created a special phone number that would break through the "noise" of routine calls going to their BH Coordinator. The role lent itself well to the pandemic world since some patients were not able or comfortable going into the office to seek support.

AIM

CHC's goal is to support behavioral health patients with rapid, real-time connection with behavioral health support. The BH Triage role has been a valuable tool in the fight against burn-out of mental health providers. It also gives primary care, dental and others a routine way to access an on-the-spot consultation for providers and support for patients.

PROCESS

The BH Triage provider does not carry a patient schedule and is available to take calls or meet with patients in person. Triage duties vary depending on the volume and type of calls that came in. BH Triage may talk directly with patients or consult with providers/staff for next steps/support.

CHALLENGES

- On rare occasions, two BH Triage occur simultaneously.
- Having a coverage plan in place when the one BH Triage Clinician is out.

RESULTS

- BH Triage has gotten calls from primary care providers, RN's, call center, walk-in clinics, family/friends, self, nutrition, dental, front desk, medical assistants, from other BH Team members and via the portal. They have been tracking calls for the past two years and on course for an 18% increase from 2022-2023.

SUCCESSES OF THE BH TRIAGE CLINICIAN

- No turnover on BH Team in 4 years.
- Patients speak with an expert level provider who has the time it takes to adequately assess risk and safely plan.
- 90% of the calls were managed by BH Triage with no further intervention needed.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Ongoing education is necessary to maintain awareness of the service to keep it well-utilized and growing.
- Patients often start the conversation for BH care with Triage because they are comfortable/ familiar with CHC system and providers.
- BH support is sometimes needed by teams who they would not typically expect to hear from (i.e., dental, nutrition).

NEXT STEPS

- Evaluate if more FTEs are needed to meet the needs of the organization as they grow, and patient volumes increase.
- Find strategies to improve the workflow for contacting patients following psych discharge.



Association Promising Practice reports aim to support Community Health Centers in leading and developing disruption and innovation by identifying successful innovations and communicating promising practices to the statewide network
Read the full report at wacommunityhealth.org/promising practices

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