



INTEGRATED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH MANUAL

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW TO START,
GROW, OR ENHANCE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
SERVICES IN PRIMARY CARE

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EM Consulting

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INTRODUCTION

This manual is intended to provide support for behavioral health clinicians engaged in the complex work of practicing in integrated settings, as well as offer guidance for the necessary operational, leadership and cultural aspects of a whole-person care system.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Background and Purpose.....	4
Typical Differences Between Behavioral Health Services In a Traditional Setting vs. a Medical Setting	6
Common Concerns of Behavioral Health Clinicians in Integrated Settings	9
Integrated Behavioral Health Leadership.....	11
Patient Experience.....	13
Environment of Care.....	13
Improving Patient Experience.....	15
Comfort and Accommodation for Patients With Mental Health Conditions: How to increase mental health cultural competency in the traditional medical setting	16
Patient Care Offices in Integrated Behavioral Health Settings.....	18
Computers and Electronic Health Records in the Behavioral Health Visit.....	19
Collaboration and Teamwork	21
The Many Roles of a Clinician in Integrated Behavioral Health Settings	21
The Role of the Psychiatrist and the Behavioral Health Clinician	22
Common Intersections of Behavioral Health and Physical Health.....	24
For Medical Providers	26
What Does a Therapist Actually Do?.....	26
Tips for Medical Providers Working on a Team With Behavioral Health Providers.....	29
Communication and the Healthcare Team	31
Communicating with Medical Professionals and the Healthcare Team	31
Warm Hand-Offs, Cool Hand-Offs, and Step-Ins: Philosophy, Procedures, and Related Communication.....	36
Sample Scripts for Behavioral Health Clinicians Referring Patients to Primary Care	42
Clinician Relationships with Employees.....	44
Operational Integration.....	47
An Introduction to Operational Integration.....	47
Multi-Level Integration Depth Assessment.....	50
Behavioral Health Staffing Ratios.....	57
Recruitment and Hiring of Behavioral Health Providers.....	59
Behavioral Health Provider Productivity in Integrated Settings	63
Documentation and Billing.....	66
Patient Paperwork Guidelines for Behavioral Health Providers	71
Confidentiality	73
Private Medical Practices	76
Behavioral Health Integration in Private Medical Organizations and Practices	76
Screening and Assessment.....	80
Principles of Screening and Assessment.....	80
Screening and Assessment Tools	82
Clinical Interventions	84
Establishing an Effective Therapeutic Alliance	84

Difficult Relationships Between the Medical Team and Patients87

The Behavioral Health Clinician’s Role in Chronic Disease Management 90

Addictive Disorders Intervention92

Trauma and Trauma Related Disorders 101

Crisis Intervention..... 105

De-Escalation 107

Motivational Interviewing 114

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy 117

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy 119

Seeking Safety 121

Problem Solving Therapy..... 123

Behavioral Activation..... 124

Clinician Support..... 125

 Clinician Self Care and Well-Being..... 125

 Clinical Supervision..... 128

Conclusion..... 131

 Summary 131

 Resources for Further Exploration..... 132

Bibliography 133

Appendix..... 134

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

For a long time, it has been universally recognized that mental illness and substance use have significant impacts on one's overall health and wellness. However, over the last decade, integrated, person-centered, care approaches that treat the full spectrum of one's health needs, including mental health and substance use issues, have become increasingly popular. There is an abundance of research demonstrating integrated care's positive effects on clinical outcomes, patient experience, and healthcare costs. It reduces the stigma of receiving behavioral health services for individuals who would not normally have sought treatment outside of the primary care setting, simultaneously addresses co-occurring behavioral and physical health disorders, and saves organizations and health plans money. In this sense, integrating behavioral health services and primary care is no longer thought of as a new or innovative model, but instead, considered to be a standard of care.

While some form of integration has been happening in health centers since the 1960s, the last 12 years have seen a significant acceleration in the field. In 2006, the California Endowment and the Tides Foundation launched the Integrated Behavioral Health Project (IBHP), the first statewide effort in California to advance integrated care. Since that time there have been numerous federal, state, and philanthropic grants aimed at advancing integration in the safety net, primarily funding "bi-directional" integration that integrates primary care into traditionally mental health and/or substance abuse organizations. However, the most robust integration continues to occur in community clinics. This manual is written, specifically, with this (and clinicians practicing in this setting) in mind.

Although integration has been steadily gaining momentum, it is important to note that integrating behavioral health and primary care still poses many challenges. Beyond issues with funding, systemic or organizational change, and healthcare policy, working within the culture of a traditional primary care setting can feel alienating for behavioral health providers because of the philosophical difference between behavioral health and primary care. Primary care can appear to be a system that supports overwork and burnout, lacks a focus on person-centered care and partnership with patients, or fails to provide adequate empathy for the patients' experiences and struggles. Some behavioral health providers fear that integration in primary care settings threatens to subsume the behavioral health culture, leaving them to feel chronically overwhelmed and concerned about the quality of care they are providing. However, integration should not be avoided for these reasons. Instead these points should only point to the importance of consciously integrating behavioral health AND primary care, as opposed to integrating behavioral health INTO primary care. This manual hopes to guide practicing behavioral health clinicians who wish to understand how to provide services in an integrated setting or are preparing to implement integrated care in their workplace. In addition, it aims to serve as a comprehensive overview of the philosophical, clinical, administrative, and operational considerations of effective integrated care.

Much of the perspective here come from my own 13 years (and counting) of experience working as a clinician in primary care settings, some comes from being a Director of Behavioral Health in an FQHC for a decade, and much comes from the experiences shared with me by many wise behavioral health and medical provider colleagues. This second edition of the manual is composed to reflect a "point in time" in the field of integrated behavioral health, as it is one that is dynamic and constantly changing and evolving. In this spirit, I would invite and encourage readers to provide suggestions and feedback to any parts of this manual. Lastly, it is my hope

that this manual is not interpreted as directive in any sense. I hope that it is only supportive and reflective of the complex work we are all engaged in.

- Elizabeth Morrison

TYPICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES IN A TRADITIONAL SETTING VS. A MEDICAL SETTING

There are many different definitions of Integrated Behavioral Health and even more definitions of “Integrated Care”. This is likely due to the newness of the terminology, as it only just over a decade old, and because the terminology is often used to describe very different models of care. However, for the purpose of this manual, it can be helpful to consider the definition provided by The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). AHRQ defines Integrated Behavioral Health as:

“The care a patient experiences as a result of a team of primary care and behavioral health clinicians, working together with patients and families, using a systematic and cost-effective approach to provide patient-centered care for a defined population”.

In essence, it is the attempt to address the multiple social, psychological and physical healthcare needs of patients in a comprehensive and collaborative manner. It involves the treatment of mental health, substance use disorders, as well interventions on health behaviors (such as exercise, social support and diet) and on patients' relationship to their health and its challenges. These interventions and treatments all consider the patient's life stressors and social contexts, the psychological effects of physical health symptoms, and the barriers to effectively utilizing the services available to them. Most importantly, it involves a diverse healthcare team, who work together with the patient to provide person-centered, holistic, care.

This might seem complicated, idealistic, or even unrealistic, given the historically narrow definition of “healthcare” (which usually excluded services beyond medical care) and the traditionally siloed operations, financing, and delivery of healthcare services. However, integrating behavioral health and medical services has now become the accepted philosophy of care due to its compatibility with the Quadruple Aim (improving patient experience, improving the health of populations, reducing healthcare costs, and improving the healthcare team experience) the plethora of research regarding its effectiveness, and clear data on patient preference.

In comparing Integrated Behavioral Health settings to more traditional mental health settings, there are a number of characteristics that make it unique.

PRACTICE DIFFERENCES:

More time is spent in direct patient care. In integrated settings, 5-7 hours of the day are spent in direct patient care. This is in distinct contrast to many traditional mental health settings where only about 2-4 hours a day are spent in direct patient care. Not surprisingly, in integrated settings, less time is also spent on documentation, paperwork, and case management activities. Much of this is due to differences in assessments procedures (Screening and Assessment), insurance and payer driven reports (such as discharge summaries, burdensome assessment and referral procedures, etc.), scheduling, and the workplace's culture of collaboration between mental health and primary care providers.

Providers operate at a quicker pace. In integrated settings, the pace of work is generally quicker than that of more traditional mental health settings. Therapy sessions usually range between 30-50 minutes, sometimes without longer first visits. With this, some systems schedule time for paperwork between sessions, or allow a clinician a block of time each week, while others require clinicians to rely on no-shows appointments or the end of the day to complete their documentation. In integrated settings, it is not uncommon for a clinician to go directly from one patient to the next with no more than just a few minutes of break in between.

Schedules are less predictable. In integrated settings schedules are not always predictable. In many integrated systems, a standard scheduled appointment is only one of the many ways a behavioral health provider comes into contact with a patient. Behavioral health providers also see patients through warm hand-offs, cool hand-offs, or step-ins ([Warm Hand-Offs, Cool Hand-Offs, and Step-ins: Philosophy, Procedures, and Related Communication](#)), maximizing the use of the clinicians' time in direct services. While the degree to which organizations or individual clinicians adopt these scheduling strategies varies, generally speaking, working in integrated systems calls for a high amount of flexibility, rapid decision making skills, and superior levels of adaptability to meet the needs of both the patients and the healthcare team on any given day.

Providers often use the “warm hand-off” technique. Related to the above, many organizations utilize what is often called the “warm hand-off” technique to help patients move smoothly between providers of different disciplines on the same day. This means that when a patient comes in for one service (usually a medical visit) and is identified to have another need (such as a behavioral health need), the original provider directly introduces the patient to the new provider on that same day. This face-to-face introduction is beneficial for a multitude of reasons. It allows the patient to be seen while they are already in the clinic, increases the likelihood that they will return for their next appointment, and allows for intervention to occur at a time when a patient has expressed a need or desire for the new services. In considering behavioral health services specifically, the meeting allows for the patient to alleviate some of the fears of what therapy will entail and enables the clinician to provide immediate feedback to the medical team about any diagnosis or treatment directions. Cool hand-offs and step-ins are similar evolutions of the warm hand-off ([Warm Hand-Offs, Cool Hand-Offs, and Step-ins: Philosophy, Procedures, and Related Communication](#)).

Providers see patients who would not normally have sought behavioral health services. This is one of the most important and rewarding benefits of integrated behavioral health. Stigma is still a significant barrier to seeking behavioral health services for many patients who have behavioral health needs. Integration significantly reduces this stigma because it pairs behavioral healthcare with a less stigmatizing type of care – medical care. Seeking behavioral healthcare is normalized by having behavioral health providers at the same sites as medical providers, sharing the same parking lots and waiting rooms, and having both behavioral health and medical questions on intake forms and other organization print materials. Additionally, there are many different ways a patient can be referred for behavioral health services. A patient may have indicated a need or a desire to see a behavioral health professional on a screening form, they may have expressed it verbally to a primary care provider, or the healthcare team may have assessed that a patient would benefit from behavioral health services during a visit (for example, by falling into a standardized multidisciplinary clinical pathway, such as treatment for chronic pain, obesity, or depression, which triggers an automated referral). The fact that these patients have not initially sought behavioral health services, but rather, were identified to have a behavioral health need after coming into the clinic to receive primary care, poses one of the greatest practice differences between integrated settings and traditional mental health settings. Many of the patients have neither met a behavioral health provider nor obtained counseling services before. This requires the clinician to establish what therapy is, how it may be helpful to the patient, and develop a strong therapeutic alliance with them from the very beginning of the intervention.

PHILOSOPHICAL DIFFERENCES:

Care is coordinated between providers. SAMHSA/HRSA states that care coordination “involves bringing together various providers and information systems to coordinate health services, patient needs, and information to help better achieve the goals of treatment and care”. There is research to show that this not only increases efficiency and efficacy, but that it also produces superior clinical outcomes in patient care, improves patient satisfaction and medical provider job satisfaction. It is important to note that care coordination is related to, but also distinct from, working on a team. The larger philosophy and practice of

care coordination is to establish entire systems that strive to meet the goals of shared patient care plans, which are patient-driven, individualized, and grounded in the patient's belief system, values, preferences and strengths. Integrated systems are designed to facilitate consistent and effective communication between all members of the healthcare team, including, most importantly, the patient.

Behavioral health clinicians are part of a larger healthcare team. While many behavioral health clinicians have worked on treatment teams in the past with psychiatrists, substance use disorder specialists, school personnel, and others, traditionally, these teams have not included primary care providers or other medical staff. In integrated settings, the behavioral health clinician works with medical professionals and support staff to simultaneously address the behavioral and physical health needs of their patients. On these teams, the medical professionals are the “specialists” on physical health, the behavioral health clinicians are the “specialists” on behavioral health, and all other members of the team are responsible for seeing and responding to the patient's whole health ([Communicating with Medical Professionals and the Healthcare Team](#)). This approach allows the behavioral health provider to actively include the patient's physical wellness into assessment and treatment from the beginning of intervention, something that has been traditionally overlooked in the field of behavioral health up until this point ([Common Intersections of Behavioral Health and Physical Health](#)).

There is a concurrent focus on individuals and whole populations. This means that in addition to a focus on individual treatment for patients, there is a focus on developing systems of care that utilize population management tools in order to intervene effectively with particular populations. For example, the implementation of tools that screen whole populations (such as screening all children between the ages of 4-16 for behavioral health concerns, all post-partum women for depression, or all patients 13 and up for addictive disorders) and designed standardized treatment pathways for specific groups of patients (such as referring all chronic pain patients to behavioral health for assessment of substance use disorders and other behavioral health issues or referring all patients who score over 12 on a PHQ-9 to behavioral health for services). With this, integrated systems work to increase their capacity to track progress and outcomes of specific populations and ultimately aim to design preventative health interventions for targeted conditions or populations.

COMMON CONCERNS OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CLINICIANS IN INTEGRATED SETTINGS

Integrated Behavioral Health is not “real” mental health treatment. In some cases, this could very well be true. Different people and different organizations define “Integrated Behavioral Health” in different ways and because the term is so broadly used, it is important to clarify what an organization exactly means when they say “Integrated Behavioral Health”. Originally the term did refer to a model of mental healthcare that was very different from what behavioral health clinicians would normally think of as mental health treatment. In some of the early integrated models, sessions were no longer than 20 minutes and were more consistent with “health coaching” than therapy. The visits focused on intervening on a targeted behavior, for example, daily exercise, and there was no psychosocial assessment, history taking, eliciting of past trauma, or other techniques considered to be standard in traditional therapy. In fact, the relationship between the provider and the patient wasn't a primary consideration at all - developing a strong therapeutic alliance was not a “goal”. Under such systems, a behavioral health clinician might have seen upwards of 15-20 patients a day, most of whom were referred directly, and only, from the primary care provider. Today, “Integrated Behavioral Health” has become a term that no longer describes one specific rigid model of care delivery, but rather, refers to any type of integration of behavioral health and medical services. As such, many organizations use the term to simply describe the co-location of mental health and medical services while others use it to describe the provision of only brief therapy with short visits. Still others have grown to offer a broader range of behavioral health services, to include anything from single visit health coaching, short term therapy, long term therapy, substance use disorder specific treatment, and much more.

Integrating behavioral health into the primary care setting will mean that behavioral health becomes “medicalized”. Without a purposeful intention to avoid this, it is a strong possibility. It is true that most integrated systems at this time focus on providing medical care to patients. Some have as many as 10 times the amount of primary care providers as behavioral health providers. Moreover, primary care providers and other medical staff usually have little to no knowledge of mental health and mental health treatment. They may assume and expect that behavioral health clinicians will subscribe to their norms but fail to understand how this might compromise the ability of the behavioral health clinician to provide effective services. For example, they may be resistant to providing the behavioral health clinician with an office that is comfortable and therapeutic. They may fail to provide funds for a clinician to buy toys to be used in therapy, reference books, or other critical office supplies. Further, they may not understand the need for regular supervision, consent to treat and Releases of Information (ROI) forms, or even the differing mandated reporting requirements of behavioral health clinicians and primary care providers. For these reasons, it is important for behavioral health to preserve the tenets of their culture within the primary care setting. Behavioral health clinicians should be integrated into the leadership of primary care organizations, should help to reflect the importance of a patient's relationship with their therapist, articulate all of the necessary factors that go into building a strong therapeutic alliance, and ensure that important legal and ethical principles are upheld. Moreover, having a behavioral health leader, in title, to sit at the table with the executive team ensures that behavioral health services are not thought of as “extra” or “auxiliary” to primary care. If the leadership believes that the behavioral health clinician's only job is to intervene on patients who are presenting as “problematic” for the primary care provider, behavioral health will likely be absorbed by the medical culture. However, if the leadership maintains a vision of healthcare as something that treats the whole-person and does not separate the mind and the body, they will have a strong foundation for truly integrating the two cultures, while maintaining what is best about each.

30 minute visits?! My patients will hate that! In the integrated behavioral health field, 30-minute visits are often talked about as one of the fundamental tenets of “the model”. This is unequivocally not the case. There is no rule about 30 minute visits in integrated behavioral health settings. Many organizations that have high levels of integration use 45, 50, or 60-minute visit templates, as well. With that said, in integrated settings it is

more common for clinicians see more patients in a day, sometimes for shorter periods of time than in traditional mental health settings. For clinicians who are used to doing hour-long sessions or even 90-minute assessments, it is hard to imagine how to squeeze therapy into a 30-minute visit. They don't see how they will be able to perform well as a therapist and believe it will leave their patients feeling unsatisfied. Clinicians may also assume that anything less than a 50-minute visit couldn't possibly be "real" therapy. However, it is important to note that most of these assumptions about the connection between treatment efficacy and the length of session are not based in research. As old as Freud, the 50-minute hour is certainly the dominant construct in therapy. However, it is what most would consider to be an evidence-based practice, in the sense that there isn't a body of conclusive research, demonstrating the effectiveness when compared against shorter sessions. When approached with a curious and open mind, clinicians are able to experiment with the amount of time they need in session. In fact, many clinicians find that working within shorter time periods actually makes them better clinicians. They find that they are better able to build rapport, convey empathy, elicit disclosures, and provide interventions more efficiently. Clinicians may find that many patients are very satisfied with receiving behavioral health services within a shorter time frame (and in fact, children and adolescents in particular seem to prefer it). As with all behavioral health services, patient satisfaction tends to vary more based on their connection with their therapist and their larger experience at the clinic, as opposed to the length of the appointment or even the specific intervention being used.

Even when scheduling templates have been developed with 2 appointments an hour, this doesn't mean the appointments each have to be 30 minutes long. For example, a doctor who may have 4 patients scheduled in an hour. They don't necessarily see each patient for exactly 15 minutes. They may have a "no-show" or only need 10 minutes with one patient but 30 minutes with another. In the same way, the length of a BH session can depend on the patient's needs within the context of how much time the clinician has. While it can initially feel stressful to be flexible about how long patients are in session, with practice it becomes easier for the clinician and can even be liberating. For example, a clinician may embrace the process of seeing a patient in an exam room for 15 minutes to make a therapeutic connection and then have a longer session with the patient the following week. They may also begin to appreciate the unpredictability of their schedule. They may enjoy that on some days, only 7 patients show up but they have 2-3 warm hand-offs and on other days, 3 patients come in, but they have 2 warm hand-offs and end up spending 50 minutes with another patient in an exam room.

INTEGRATED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH LEADERSHIP

In 2004, The California Endowment (TCE) began a small initiative called The Integrated Behavioral Health Project. They found eight safety-net primary care healthcare organizations in California that had existing integrated behavioral health services and gave them (very) small grants over the next 3 years to gather data and cultivate learnings from their sites in order to better disseminate and spread IBH practices throughout California. TCE called these eight organizations IBH “Vanguards” for their early trailblazing of the IBH field. All but one of these organizations continued to grow and develop IBH services, succeeding with long term sustainability, while simultaneously deepening and broadening services.

In 2017, the California Health Care Foundation funded a gathering of the behavioral health leaders from these original eight organizations in order to better understand what factors had driven their success and sustainability, as well as what could be learned from the many other organizations in the field that had attempted to integrate behavioral health but only had limited success or outright failed.

What they found was that the number one driver of success was having a strong, effective, behavioral health leader, who had authority, responsibility and a leadership-focused title to match. Additionally, this behavioral health leader served on the executive leadership team, often with parity to the CMO.

Organizations that have had difficulty in sustaining or growing behavioral health services in the primary care setting have often made the mistake of recruiting and hiring a behavioral health clinician who is given the dual tasks of assuming a full case load of patients while also building an entire behavioral health “program”. Many times, this clinician is only allotted a few hours a week for the administrative and leadership duties required to establish and maintain the behavioral health program and given little support along the way, as they often report to a middle manager with little decision-making authority.

Transforming the care delivery system to address whole-person health and improve population wellbeing will remain out of reach if behavioral health leadership is not integrated at the executive level.

The following are important qualities or competencies for a behavioral health leader:

1. A deep understanding of the foundational importance of addressing behavioral health conditions in primary care.
2. An ability to communicate this vision, in a way that compels others to join the movement.
3. A history of being able to influence others and make significant change within organizations.
4. An understanding of the larger goal of culture change within primary care, from single service lines to whole-person health practices.
5. Bilingual: Ability to speak both behavioral health and medical languages, or an understanding that they are different and a willingness to learn.
6. A practicing, licensed clinician, with clinical expertise as a generalist, including working knowledge of the substance use disorder field and of the behavior change field (motivational interviewing, etc.).
7. Ability to tolerate and thrive in ambiguity, failures and setbacks.

The following are recommendations to ensure behavioral health leaders are effective. Often the best way to “test” how behavioral health leaders are treated and thought of is to see if the same categorization would work for a CMO.

1. Recruit and interview the same way for a behavioral health leader as for a CMO. Getting the right person for this position is imperative. It may be useful to use a recruitment firm.
2. The behavioral health leader should be a licensed practicing behavioral health clinician, just as a CMO should be a licensed physician. It is difficult for clinical leaders to have credibility with their direct reports if they are not also practicing.
3. Ensure seeing patients is not their main role. Administrative time should be between 1-4 days a week, depending on number of direct reports, size of the department and leadership responsibilities.
4. Consider other service lines that may belong best in the behavioral health department, including: Housing Assistance (and other social determinants of health work), Psychiatry, Health Education, Maternal Health, Complex Care Programs, HIV programs, etc.
5. Make the title match. “Director of Behavioral Health” or “Chief Behavioral Health Officer” is most effective. Avoid the term “Manager”.
6. Ensure the behavioral health leader is on the senior leadership team. This is the most efficient and effective way to ensure the transformation of the health delivery system.
7. Avoid the use of the word “program” in the job title and in general when talking about behavioral health services. Core services are not a “program”.
8. Ensure the behavioral health leader is at the table when electronic health record (HER) decisions are made, as well as when there are new sites rented or built. Decisions made in the early stages of both have long term impacts on behavioral health services at the organization.

PATIENT EXPERIENCE

ENVIRONMENT OF CARE

Given the enormously personal nature of healthcare and its supreme importance in all of our lives, one might expect that maintaining high quality interactions between providers and patients would be a top priority for healthcare professionals, clinics, organizations, and health plans. However, research tells us that these intensely human encounters that take place in the healthcare setting every day are often marked by a lack of connection, compassion, and respect. While other industries have long understood the value of skilled, kind, authentic exchanges, the healthcare field has been slow to acknowledge the importance of focusing on the human experience of patients.

For many, a trip to a healthcare organization is like a trip to the DMV, only that it is made worse by the significantly more personal nature of the visit. Patients may feel fear, pain, or dread even at the thought of going to the clinic. The customary greeting of “do you have an appointment”, spoken without a smile or even eye contact, and a directive “have a seat” in the cold, silent, interminable waiting area while being largely ignored until their name is bellowed from the door, contributes to the horribly dehumanizing experience that many have come to accept as normal. However, the cost of this sort of indifferent environment for healthcare organizations is high. The uncomfortable and cold setting lessens a patient’s confidence in their care, increases their anxiety, and decreases their satisfaction.

Placing value on the whole patient experience is particularly important for behavioral health leaders and clinicians. They understand that a patient’s experience in the reception and waiting room areas are essentially an extension of the therapeutic relationship. If sufficient goodwill is not established from the first points of contact in an organization, the therapist will have to “repair” and “catch up” to develop the adequate therapeutic alliance.

The behavioral health field has a long history of placing value on the patient’s appraisal of care and a deep understanding of its impact on treatment outcomes. With this, the field has identified empathy conveyance as the core of patient experience. Research on empathy and its effect on patient experience originated in the field of psychology during the 1950s with the work of Carl Rogers, however the past 15 years have seen an explosion of interest in studying the connection between empathy and healing. The literature has consistently demonstrated the impact of the medical providers’ empathy on patient adherence and, subsequently, health outcomes, including its ability to lower HbA1C levels, improve success in weight loss, and even lessen the duration and severity of the common cold. Of particular interest to the behavioral health field, research reveals that Motivational Interviewing and behavior change strategies grounded in the practice of successfully conveying empathy produce significant results. Overall, more than 70 clinical trials have demonstrated that these techniques produce a positive impact on patient satisfaction and healthcare outcomes. As a result, the American Psychological Association Task Force on Evidence-Based Therapy Relationships has even designated empathy as an evidence-based element of the therapeutic relationship.

It is also important to note that it is not only the empathy of medical providers that impacts a patient’s health, but that it is also the empathy conveyed by the entire organization. Improving patient experience involves great customer service and skilled communication at all levels of the organization but also a clean and organized waiting room and warm patient care offices. With this, there are a multitude of stakeholders that have an interest in improving patient experience in healthcare. Direct care providers can improve patient health outcomes by utilizing evidenced-based communication practices that improve patient adherence,

and therefore, lead to more positive health outcomes. Concurrently, payers benefit from the cost savings that these improved health outcomes bring. Human Resources benefits from staff developing empathy conveyance skills, as it not only impacts relationships with patients, but it also improves staff morale and alleviates personnel problems. Clinics benefit from focusing on empathy and customer service in a world where patients have a wider range of choice in healthcare. Today, clinics have to compete for patients. Positive patient experiences help them retain existing patients and attract new ones, as well. In practical terms, if the receptionist at clinic is perceived by the patient as warm, caring, and friendly, down the line, that patient will be more likely to adhere to physician recommendations and ultimately experience more positive health outcomes. Plainly stated, patients who are treated better become healthier.

Most importantly however, it is imperative to remember that fundamentally, everyone wants to be treated with kindness and respect at their doctor's or therapist's office, especially those who have been historically judged and stigmatized. Providers working with those who experience a severe mental illness, addictive disorder, chronic pain, or who are homeless must remember that these are the folks who have commonly been mistreated, dismissed, and given poor care in the past. They are the most vulnerable in systems of care that have substandard customer service and suffer more from a lack of empathy and understanding in healthcare organizations. Therefore, building organizational climates where skilled empathy conveyance is expected and practiced, especially with the most vulnerable patients, ensures that everyone in our community receives the highest quality of care.

IMPROVING PATIENT EXPERIENCE

Improving patient experience begins with customer service. While the term “customer service” often times brings scripted phrases and robotic employees to mind, excellent customer service aligns closely with the practice of successfully conveying empathy. Both customer service and conveying empathy rely on the same skills sets - communicating a sense of warmth and goodwill, skilled listening, acknowledging the perspective and feelings of customers and patients, and preserving their sense of dignity and respect.

Much of the current patient experience field focuses on access to services (next available appointments) and fast service (decreasing wait times). While both of these are certainly important and all of us have been frustrated by endless phone system loops and long waits, it is really the patient's *perception or interpretation* of wait times or poor access that is important. Many times long wait times and poor phone access convey a lack of caring and respect. Patients who wait in cold, brightly lit, crowded waiting rooms after being “greeted” with a grim face and are not spoken to again during their hour-long wait, are going to *interpret and experience* this wait very differently than the patient who is warmly greeted, informed apologetically that the wait is over 45 minutes, offered water and snacks, as well as crayons and coloring papers for their children, and kept informed during their wait by employees who come around to check-in with them.

In summary, if we decrease wait times and improve phone access without improving how we convey warmth and kindness to patients, their overall experience will be much the same. By contrast, even when wait times or access to care does not change, improving skilled communication with patients has a dramatically positive impact on the patient's experience. Admittedly, the great difficulty with this model is that an organization must focus on how their employees treat patients *interpersonally*. This demands a *whole-scale culture change on all levels* and this is much more difficult to change than adding a phone or a few more appointment slots.

The development of integrated behavioral health services is a prime opportunity for organizations to fully embrace empathy as a care value, and concurrently develop policies, procedures and workflows that support and enhance skilled interpersonal connections between employees and patients. Behavioral health providers can lead organizations in developing skilled communication learning and training activities, for both medical providers and staff, as well as assist human resources in developing recruitment and hiring practices with a bias toward those who are skilled communicators and who understand the primary importance of communication.

The Environmental Empathy Assessment included in the appendix provides more information on how to measure specific indicators of a warm care environment that prioritizes patient experience in the integrated healthcare office.

COMFORT AND ACCOMMODATION FOR PATIENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS: HOW TO INCREASE MENTAL HEALTH CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN THE TRADITIONAL MEDICAL SETTING

As stated in the documents above, behavioral health providers do not provide services in a vacuum and patient sessions do not start when the patient walks into the provider's office. Instead, the patient's experience of behavioral health (and other clinic services) is much broader. It encompasses all contact the patient has with the organization's staff, including making appointments, phone interactions, and most significantly, the waiting room experience. Behavioral health providers have a unique responsibility to lead the organization in patient experience and more specifically, in cultural competency for those who have mental health issues and addictive disorders. Below are some important considerations for accommodating patients with these conditions.

- Ensure that the organization's written policy on disability accommodation specifically includes those with mental illnesses.
- Provide orientation for all staff and providers on basic mental health information, such as:
 - The organization's mission and how it supports treating those who have mental health conditions.
 - The organization's values and how they support treating those with mental health conditions.
 - The prevalence of mental health conditions to address the tendency to think in "us and them" terms. More resources for mental health prevalence data can be found in the [Resources for Further Exploration](#) section.
 - Empathy activating and stigma reducing information, such as effective patient stories and historical information about the poor treatment of those who have mental health conditions.
- More in depth training of the receptionists, as they are the ones who spend the most time with patients and set the tone of the organization. Training should cover mental health conditions, specifically thought disorders, personality disorders and anxiety, and how these conditions might present on the phone or in the waiting room, as well as how to best comfort and accommodate those who have these conditions during the wait time.
- Written protocols should exist for providing alternative appointment times and/or alternative waiting areas when a patient desires (for example, to accommodate severe social anxiety). These protocols should follow the spirit of reasonable accommodation, with the understanding that most organizations do not have extra space. Protocols can include:
 - Alternative options available to patients for waiting, when they desire (such as, in their car, outside, in an empty exam room, in an empty office, in an office with a staff member, etc).
 - Examples of when to offer these options to patients.
 - How to let patients know that they can ask for alternative waiting options when they come in.

- When and how to intervene with patients who are having visible symptoms in the waiting room.
 - How and when to offer appointment times that lessen the chance of waiting (first appointment of the morning, or after lunch, etc.).
- Have therapists not only co-located to provide treatment, but on-site to provide education and support to other staff and providers. Having therapists as on-site experts to provide education and support to other staff and providers tends to lower fear, judgment and stigma of patients with mental health conditions, which results in better care.

SAMPLE WAITING ROOM ENVIRONMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR ACCOMMODATING PERSONS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS:

- Efforts should be made to avoid florescent lighting, which increases the institutional feel of a clinic and decreases feelings of emotional warmth. In addition, florescent lighting has been shown to increase stress, migraines, and anxiety.
- Screening tools that include mental health symptoms, if administered in the waiting room, should be given universally so that those with mental health conditions do not feel singled out. Moreover, universal screenings also show organizations the patients who want to hear and know about the psychological difficulties they are experiencing, but did not come into the clinic to receive behavioral health services. With this, the universal screenings increase the probability that those with these conditions will feel welcome.
- If patients are having visible symptoms, such as talking to themselves, talking to other patients about delusional content, anxiously pacing, etc. a staff member should go up them and quietly offer a private area for them to wait. Ideally the behavioral health provider or another skilled staff member can talk with the patient to elicit where and how they might be most comfortable. This is done for the patients' comfort as well as others'. If space does not allow for a separate private area, other options include having the patients wait in an empty exam room, an empty office or, if the patient's condition warrants, in an office with a staff member. If patients are comfortable waiting outside, that can be an option also. Receptionists can let the team know where the patient will be when it is time for their appointment.
- Patients should be informed that they can ask for alternative waiting options when they come in, such as waiting in their car, at outdoor tables, or an empty exam room or office.
- Patients should be informed of the estimated wait time when they check in and periodic updates should be given as they wait.
- Water should be available or offered to patients when they check in, in the spirit of demonstrating concern and care for the patient's comfort.
- Staff members should regularly visit the waiting room to tidy up, interact with patients warmly, offer parents crayons and papers for children, etc. This sense of attending/befriending patients in the waiting room not only decreases the chance of behavioral escalations, but it also provides a comforting presence for all who have come for care.

PATIENT CARE OFFICES IN INTEGRATED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SETTINGS

Behavioral health offices are the “exam rooms” of therapists. Research indicates that the patient's level of comfort in the office has a direct impact on their level of disclosures and how much empathy they feel. This, in turn, impacts how effective an assessment is, the accuracy of a diagnosis, their adherence to recommendations, and subsequently, their overall health outcomes. While all offices vary in size and layout and are influenced by the individual clinician's preferences or the organization's norms, all offices should have standard minimum furnishings and configurations to ensure that the patient has the best experience possible.

Configuration: There should not be any barriers, even desks, between the therapist and the patient. Desks should instead border a wall, allowing the therapist to face patients and family members without anything in between them. There should be open seating with enough room for a patient and a minimum of 1-2 family members. Ideally, there should also be a small space for children to play. This can be a table with some coloring supplies or even just a clean spot on a carpeted floor with appropriate toys.

Privacy: Offices should be and should feel, private. If the office's walls are thin, the therapist may use sound machines, such as a white noise machine (either inside the room or outside of the room) to muffle noise both ways.

Furnishings: When furnishing an office, maximizing the patient's comfort should always be the priority. Whenever space permits, small loveseats or upholstered chairs should be used in place of hard office chairs. Research has also shown that overhead lighting has impacts on migraines, anxiety, general stress, and inhibits patient disclosure. Because of this, overhead fluorescent lighting should be replaced with floor or desk lamps and wall lighting. Art should be placed on two walls in the office and be consistent with the organization's standards. With this, it is important to note that therapy rooms usually avoid abstract art, which is more apt to be interpreted as frightening or threatening by individuals who may be suffering from active psychosis. In most offices, personal trinkets and photos are also minimized, but discussions about what sorts of art or photographs are appropriate to display should be had with a clinical supervisor. Lastly, books, papers, and file folders should be neatly tucked away on a shelf or in a cabinet.

Appearance: Generally, as stated above, it is important that offices are clean and organized. As research indicates, the patient's perception of the office as a comfortable, private, orderly, environment instills confidence in the given organization and the specific clinician, which subsequently has great impacts on their health outcomes. Clutter, storage, boxes, piles of paper, bare walls, and papers tacked or taped to the walls are often interpreted by patients to be neglectful and even disrespectful, as an “uncared” for environment can indicate a lack of care for a patient's comfort. Still, organizations should remember that the clinician's comfort is important, as well. Behavioral health providers work in their offices for 8-9 hours a day and the effectiveness of a clinician can vary considerably depending on how comfortable they perceive their immediate environment. Organizations should remember that “the self” is the only “tool” behavioral health providers use. For this reason, creating and maintain environments that supports the clinician's work and facilitates the calibration of the self is important because it has direct impacts on how effective a clinician will be with their patients.

COMPUTERS AND ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS IN THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH VISIT

The widespread adoption of the Electronic Health Record (EHR) and the presence of computers in both exam rooms and behavioral health offices has brought about new questions surrounding how to best use the technology in the integrated behavioral health setting. As we all know, computers are useful. Healthcare professionals have used them as their “clipboards” and “notepads” for more than a decade. However, many behavioral health clinicians differ in how often and in what ways they prefer to use computers.

Some more traditional therapists tend to be hesitant to use computers during sessions for documentation. They may be used to taking notes on paper (or not taking notes at all) or feel that computers negatively affect their ability to fully focus on the patient, prevent them from skillfully listening, and inhibit their ability to form a strong therapeutic alliance. Likewise, other therapists embrace using computers during sessions. They may feel that it has no real impact on the therapeutic alliance or even more, they may have received feedback that it inspires confidence in care from patients. They may see that using computers during the session allows them to consistently refer back to the patient’s whole-health information. They can look at notes from other team members and process with the patient in real time.

Either way, it is important to note that there is no “right” way for a behavioral health clinician to use a computer. Each should make their own decisions about what works best for them, their patients, and their organization. For example, some clinics have their own standards for the use of computers in sessions. They may require clinicians to enter screening tool scores or other notes about the patient directly into the EHR during the session. Others may choose to administer screening tools during other points of care and thereby preclude the behavioral health clinician from having to do this work on a computer themselves.

However, in spite of whatever technique is ultimately chosen by the practitioner and their organization, generally speaking, a computer should always be readily accessible to the clinician. This is because there are times when consulting with a computer during a session is necessary for patient care. For example, a behavioral health clinician might find it necessary to consult with a patient’s EHR to answer their questions about a care plan or to print patient education materials. Regardless of when or how much the computer is used, here are some guidelines that can be helpful.

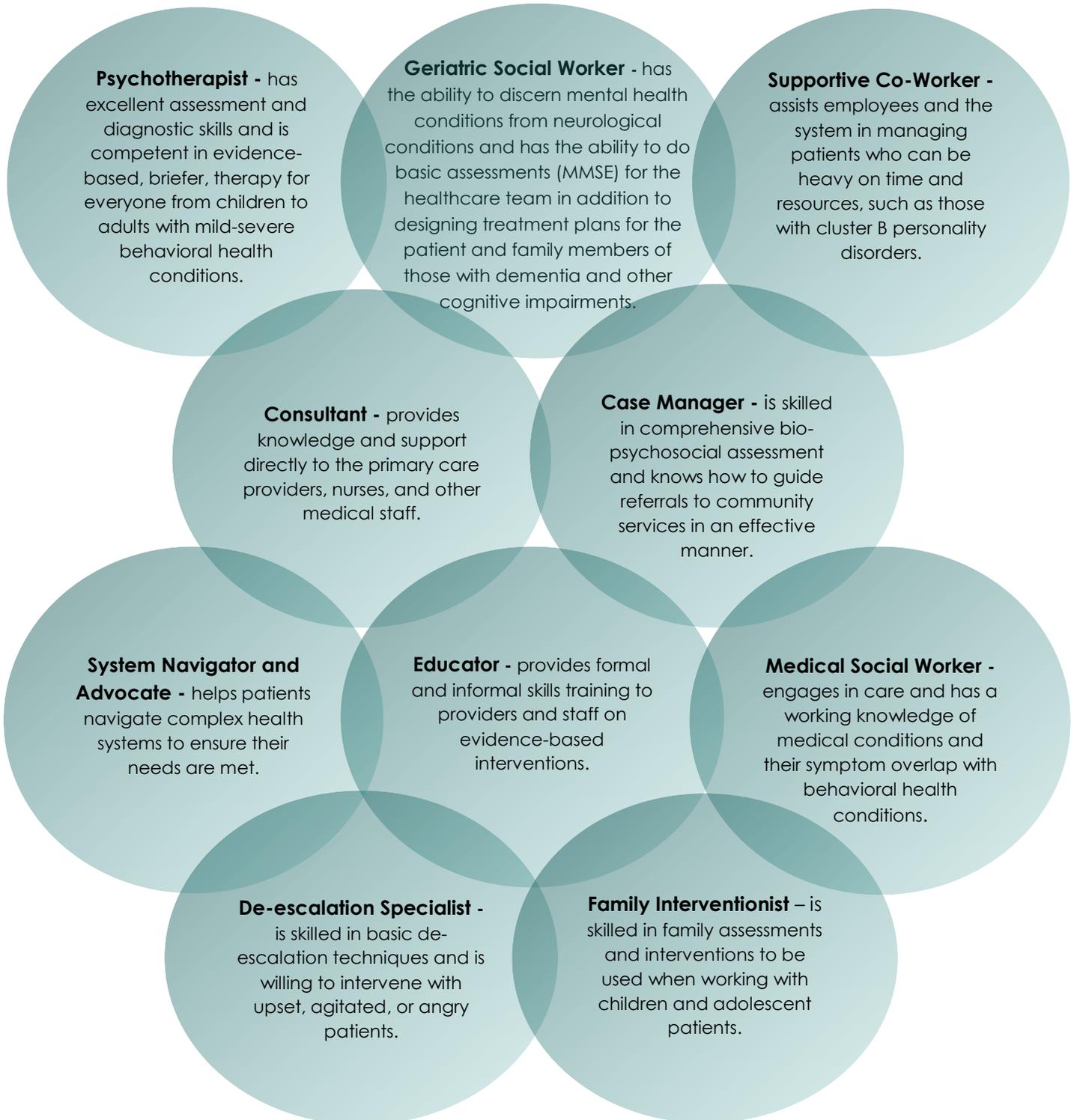
TIPS FOR USING COMPUTERS IN THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH VISIT:

1. Clearly refer to the computer as “the patient’s chart” or “health record”. This helps frame the computer as being related to and benefiting the patient.
2. Apologize for using the computer during a session. This can help to acknowledge any intrusiveness the patient might perceive. The therapist might say something like, “I apologize - if you can give me a moment, I am just going to look quickly at your chart to answer your question”.
3. Narrate the use of the computer to clearly identify when the clinician is using it and when the clinician is attending directly to the patient. This can mitigate any potential damage to the therapeutic alliance. The therapist might say something like, “I am going to document your depression assessment right now on the computer so that we can have it in the record to refer back to later (*typing, looking at computer...*) Okay, thank you for waiting. (*Eye contact, listening, and no typing*) Tell me more about how your depression has impacted you?”

4. Avoid having a desk between the clinician and the patient (Patient Care Offices in Integrated Behavioral Health Settings). Using a computer on a desk between the clinician and the patient will further compound the difficulty.
5. Avoid typing while" listening". Regardless of how skilled a clinician might feel they are at typing and listening at the same time, attention is, by default, split between these two tasks. Often times, the result is substandard listening.

COLLABORATION AND TEAMWORK

THE MANY ROLES OF A CLINICIAN IN INTEGRATED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SETTINGS



THE ROLE OF THE PSYCHIATRIST AND THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CLINICIAN

Due to the shortage of psychiatric services in the United States, California, and above all, communities serving safety net populations, the main goal of having a psychiatrist in an integrated setting is to enhance the medical provider's skill and comfort with psychoactive medication management. Particularly with complicated patients, psychiatrists increase the health team's understanding of behavioral health conditions and help to lower anxiety, fear, or bias that may come with caring for individuals experiencing issues with mental health. Having psychiatrists, in addition to behavioral health clinicians within an integrated system can, therefore, have a dramatic impact on how staff and medical providers think about and care for those with severe mental health issues.

To this end, the psychiatrist's role on the integrated healthcare team is just as much about teaching and consulting with medical providers, as it is about seeing and treating patients face to face. Ideally, a psychiatrist's time will be allocated to both accordingly.

ROLES OF THE PSYCHIATRIST:

Consultant: Providing telephone, text, email, or "curbside" consultations directly to medical providers. These contacts are typically in response to requests from primary care providers for specific information or advice about patient medication decisions and management.

Teacher: Facilitating the learning and development of the healthcare team (in both formal and informal ways) surrounding issues regarding pharmacological treatment of complex psychiatric conditions, such as treating those who are pregnant or have other co-morbid medical complexities.

Clinical Mentor: Providing both formal and informal teaching and supervision for behavioral health clinicians in assessment, diagnosis, and treatment.

Clinical Provider: Administering direct care to patients. This involves performing assessments that determine the appropriate medication(s) for a patient and identify any changes that need to be made in pharmacological treatment. In integrated systems, psychiatrists rarely continue to follow stable patients or manage their refills. Primary care providers are typically responsible for these tasks. This reserves the psychiatrist's time for initial assessments and treatment decisions. Psychiatrists also almost never provide therapy. Instead the behavioral health clinicians are responsible for this course of treatment. The Director of Behavioral Health, the CMO, and the psychiatrist typically develop flexible referral protocols that establish the appropriate use of psychiatry. For example, they may decide that for someone with ADHD, but no co-morbidities, the primary care provider will take the lead in treatment. However, with more complex mood disorders or when treating someone who has a history of pharmacological treatment failures, pregnancy, or psychosis, the psychiatrist will play a much larger role. While every system is different, most systems will have developed written guidelines for appropriate referrals to psychiatry.

Preceptor: Providing follow-up support. In most cases, psychiatrists will see patients 1-3 times or until they are somewhat stable on their medication regimen. After that, psychiatrists usually provide support to medical providers through email, text, and phone when they have questions or concerns.

ROLE OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CLINICIANS WITH PSYCHIATRY:

Different clinic systems have different practices and protocols about the role of behavioral health clinicians within psychiatry services. The following are common roles of behavioral health clinicians when interacting with psychiatrists in integrated systems.

Primary Referrer: In many integrated systems, the behavioral health clinicians are the only referral pathways to psychiatric services. This is usually because behavioral health clinicians are asked to do the assessments before referring patients to the psychiatrist, direct referrals from primary care providers are sometimes inaccurate or inappropriate, it facilitates greater communication between the behavioral health clinicians and the psychiatrists about what is working and what needs to be changed in the referral pathway, and it ensures that those who are referred to psychiatry are concurrently in therapy, or have at least been assessed for a need and desire for therapy.

Shape and Frame Expectations for Patients: Psychiatry tends to have an archetypical reputation to patients. It brings to mind a “super therapist” who is all knowing, has unlimited insight, and a couch to lie down on. It is important that behavioral health clinicians shape the patient's expectations of the psychiatrist. They should reiterate that the psychiatrist is a doctor who they will be consulting with about medication and treatment, but that the patient will likely see them only a few times. If the shaping of expectations is not done sufficiently, patients typically expect therapy from the psychiatrist and are irritable or disappointed with their visit. Their unhappiness with the visit can subsequently impact their confidence in the treatment recommendations and thus their adherence to the treatment plan, so it is important to frame expectations during the first visit.

Liaison and Relationship Facilitator: Behavioral health clinicians are instrumental in facilitating trusting and communicative relationship development between the psychiatrists and other medical providers, as they tend to have strong relationships with both. For example, a primary care provider might consult with a behavioral health clinician about a patient who continues to have audio hallucination after the initiation of an anti-psychotic and they may want to quickly refer back to psychiatry. A behavioral health clinician may encourage the primary care provider to text, email, or call the psychiatrist first and ask for their advice directly, thereby helping to establish direct communication. Likewise, sometimes a behavioral health clinician might present a case to the psychiatrist on behalf of a primary care provider and share the psychiatrist's response with the primary care provider. Either way, behavioral health clinicians are incredibly important to supporting psychiatric services. They attend brown bags and other in-services, encourage other team members to do so as well, are particularly skilled at understanding the primary care provider's needs when it comes to psychotropics, and can guide the psychiatrist's teachings to meet these needs.

COMMON INTERSECTIONS OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Behavioral health clinicians are readily aware of how physical health conditions intersect with behavioral health conditions. They understand how depression, anxiety, and substance abuse affect one's adherence to medical recommendations, how obesity affects one's emotional or psychological state, and how childhood trauma impacts one's health throughout the life course. They recognize that the distinction between the mind and the body is somewhat artificial and see integrated care as the pathway that can reunite the two. In fact, behavioral health clinicians working in integrated settings often say that 99% of patients being seen by the primary care provider could be also be referred to them and vice versa!

Although the overlap of physical health and mental health conditions is broad, it is possible to identify some specific conditions that are more commonly treated by both physical and behavioral health providers in integrated settings. Although coordinating care between providers for these conditions can sometimes be complicated, when teams work together to enhance the care they give to a patient, they are working to achieve the goal of providing whole-person care and ultimately see more long lasting, positive, health outcomes.

Insomnia: Insomnia is a condition that commonly presents itself in the medical settings and is addressed by both primary care providers and behavioral health clinicians. Primary care providers typically take the lead with completing a medical evaluation that would identify whether there is a physical health condition that is contributing to or causing the insomnia. Conversely, behavioral health clinicians will usually complete an assessment that would identify whether there is a behavioral health condition that is contributing to or causing the insomnia. More specifically, the behavioral health clinician will usually assess the patient for depression symptoms, uncontrollable worrying or General Anxiety Disorder, and substance abuse issues. But even if the patient doesn't meet the standards for a diagnosis of a mental health condition, the therapist may find that the patient feels the insomnia is having adverse impacts on their mental health. The patient may feel fearful or even angry about their lack of sleep and they might blame themselves or others for their cycle of poor sleep hygiene. Regardless of the causes of insomnia, behavioral health and physical health providers work together, communicating with each other along the way, to increase a patient's tolerance and coping with the condition.

Depression and Anxiety: Most behavioral health clinicians are very comfortable and skilled with treating depression and anxiety that is the result of past or current life events such as loss, trauma, and faulty cognitive patterns. However, it is important to remember that physical health conditions can also contribute to or cause depression and anxiety. For example, physical conditions from thyroid problems to hormone problems can cause depression and plenty of physical health conditions can manifest into anxiety. For this reason, it is important for the patient to have a thorough medical evaluation by their primary care provider when they present with symptoms of anxiety or depression. When it comes to treatment, the most important factor to consider is the patient's preference. Each patient will likely have an opinion about what sort of treatment they want. Some may be perfectly fine with taking first line medications for depression and anxiety such as Xanax and Valium while others may wish to avoid medications completely. Fundamentally, working with patients to assess their beliefs about different types of treatment is important because preference, autonomy, and choice in treatment decisions correlate with adherence and subsequently better health outcomes. Behavioral health clinicians can work with the patient to advocate for themselves around treatment decisions and collaborate with the primary care provider to prescribe medication in an empathetic fashion that validates any of the patient's difficult feelings.

Obesity: If obesity was as simple as eating less and exercising more, it is unlikely that it would be the epidemic that it is. Many times, the primary care provider takes the lead in treating obesity. He or she may evaluate the patient to rule out any medical conditions that are contributing to the obesity and maintain regular appointments with the patient to monitor their overall health and track their weight loss progress. In treating obesity in integrated settings, the behavioral health clinician will usually come in and begin by assessing the patient for a history of trauma, co-occurring anxiety, depression or other behavioral health conditions, and whether they have a binge eating disorder, or more broadly, addictive food behavior. The behavioral health clinician will also elicit and help the patient examine and explore their personal thoughts, beliefs, and experiences about/with food, eating, and body image. Engaging patients in exploring and understanding how their culture, both familial and ethnic, might influence their ideas and behavior with eating and weight is also important. Health outcomes ultimately depend on creating a treatment plan that aligns with the patient's preferences and beliefs about what they want and need. To this end, clinicians should partner with patients to elicit and assess their perceptions of their weight. A motivational interviewing framework can be helpful to do this, as it can assess where a patient is in the stages of change concerning their eating/weight and individualize interventions accordingly.

ADHD: ADHD is the most common behavioral health condition seen in pediatric populations in the primary care setting. The role of the behavioral health clinician is particularly important because differential diagnosis for behavioral health conditions is complex with ADHD. PTSD, lack of sleep, poor nutrition, abuse, problems at school such as bullying or a shaming teacher, and the like can all contribute to ADHD symptoms. In addition to the behavioral health clinician's initial interview and assessment, patients typically also need a medical evaluation to rule out any other conditions that might be causing the ADHD symptoms before anyone considers pharmacological treatment. As with all conditions that have multiple treatment options, the patient and their family's beliefs and preferences should be of primary importance. Behavioral health clinicians, primary care providers, and the patient and their family should continue to work together to monitor the response to intervention and adjust or change it as necessary along the way.

Chronic Pain: There might not be a better example of a condition that requires the support of the entire healthcare team in an integrated setting than chronic pain. Chronic pain is complex. There is often overlap between severe physical pain and histories of trauma, mood disorders, substance abuse conditions, and the like. Moreover, most behavioral health clinicians and primary care providers receive little to no training about chronic pain in graduate school and often only develop experience in assisting people who have the condition while working in a primary care setting. With this, most of what taught in graduate school is about the dangers of treating chronic pain. Providers hear case studies about accidental overdoses, the dangers of opioid medications, and "drug seekers" who are hoping to sell their medication for profit or feed and addiction. For this reason, people with chronic pain are highly stigmatized and treated very poorly. Therefore, perhaps one of the most important roles of the behavioral health clinician in treating chronic pain is to model compassion and professionalism in interactions with patients. Beyond this, the behavioral health clinician will use a clinical interview and other assessment tools to evaluate patients for mental health and substance abuse issues, functional abilities, and risk for developing addiction. They will then work with primary care providers to determine the best treatment plan that also takes into consideration the patient's preferences and beliefs. From there, the behavioral health clinician will work with patients to increase their acceptance of chronic pain, connect them with pain programs and support groups, and continue to provide clarification about treatment decisions such as a regular urinary analysis or a discontinuation of alcohol or other drug use. Throughout the process of treating someone with chronic pain, it is important for the healthcare team to maintain communication and adhere (with kindness) to any limits or boundaries in order to ensure the safety of the patient and avoid the "lenient then resentful" cycle that sometimes occurs with helping professionals.

FOR MEDICAL PROVIDERS

WHAT DOES A THERAPIST ACTUALLY DO?

(Please Note: This document was created at the request of a group of doctors, who wanted a better understanding of what therapist “do” in the room - what “treatment” is. The list below is not in any way exhaustive, but more of an attempt to describe some of the fundamental and foundational interventions therapists engage in with patients)

They skillfully listen. Therapists don’t give advice, judgment, or referee between family members. They instead engage in highly focused, mindful listening, utilizing verbal and non-verbal techniques to convey a level of complete attention to the patient. Therapists facilitate the disclosure of things that patients have kept secret for years, out of fear or shame, causing them significant emotional and physical suffering. Disclosing meaningful things in and of itself can be healing for a patient and therapists have the ability to listen to patients talk about their deep issues and feelings without judgment about their beliefs, decisions, or actions.

They help patients practice relationship skills. Many people enter into therapy because they are not satisfied with the quality of their relationships. Over time, they may have developed issues with attachment, resentment, or anger and found that these issues have manifested into faulty relationship patterns that are detrimental to their well-being. Not surprisingly, often times patients will re-create these same relationship patterns in their relationship with their therapist. For example, if a patient lacks assertiveness and rarely tells their family or friends how they feel but has a pattern of later becoming overwhelmed by resentment and eventually blowing up, this can be worked on in therapy. The therapist may try to explore how this relationship pattern plays out in their own relationship with the patient. For example, they might say “I wonder if you ever have any feelings of irritation with me or any disagreement with anything I have ever said?” or “I wonder if it is difficult to tell me how you feel about me being an hour late?”. In this way, the very patterns that have caused patients difficulties in their relationships in the past can be pulled into the therapy room, examined, and eventually changed.

They learn to identify and express feelings. Many of those who enter into therapy do so because they have trouble naming or acknowledging their feelings. This may stem from being raised by parents who were not able to name or acknowledge their feelings or it could have been something that developed over time. Either way, many people have no idea how to interpret how they really feel. They may have their voice raised and yell “I am not angry!” or even look very down or sad and say “I have no reason to be sad!”. Even when they know how they feel, they may judge themselves for having these feelings. This resistance or wall against truly identifying and accepting their own feelings causes significant diagnostic problems such as depression and poor functioning in relationships. Therapists give patients psycho-educational information about feelings and then help them to identify and express them in sessions.

They help patients to identify “thinking errors”. Thinking errors are faulty cognitive patterns that cause depression, anxiety, anger, and other issues that affect one’s mental health. Most patients have not been trained in “metacognition”, or thinking about thinking. Therefore, therapists help them to notice, identify, and name the specific cognitive patterns that are causing them problems. Moreover, therapists help patients with “cognitive correctives”, or the practice of replacing thinking errors with more helpful thought patterns. This is the crux of cognitive therapy.

They elicit motivation from patients. Therapists motivate patients to engage in helpful and healthy behaviors. Most patients, and all people in general, are ambivalent about changing their behavior. For

example, they may want to exercise every day because they know it is important, but they just feel horrible taking an hour away from the little time they have with their kids at the end of a long work day to go for a run. Or, they may want to quit smoking, but they just don't feel like they can do it right now - last time they did, they gained 40 pounds and yelled at their kids for 2 weeks. Therapists are trained in evidence-based techniques that elicit the resolution of this ambivalence (such as Motivational Interviewing). Many times, this involves motivating an individual to examine their current coping skills (such as drinking, yelling, over sleeping, over eating, or isolating) and helping them to expand their coping skills to more healthy and helpful ones.

They create meaning. Often times, patients have developed belief systems about who they are or why things have happened to them, such as "I am just too giving and people take advantage of that", "I think I am being punished by God ", or "My mom just didn't care enough about us to quit using drugs". Beliefs that support dysfunctional behaviors can be very harmful to patients, as they create self-judgment and other self-deprecating feelings. Therapists help patients to examine their own beliefs systems and make conscious decisions about what beliefs they want to keep and which ones they want to give up in order to create their own meaning for their life. This positively impacts their functioning and their level of activation around their own health in general.

They increase insight. Frequently patients do not see themselves as they are. They may not know that they frequently vent or use sarcasm. They may be unaware that they keep themselves from crying when they are sad. They may not know that their posture and tone of voice intimidates others. And likewise, they may not know their strengths and that they are actually articulate and insightful and a loving parent. Therapists give patients feedback by holding up an imaginary mirror that reflects back to the patient what others really see. For example, in session, a therapist might give a patient feedback (after asking permission) that they often vent about others in their life and frequently blame. This is descriptive feedback, not evaluative or judgmental. Giving feedback without judgment is a highly complex skill. Many patients have never received feedback but rather have only received criticism, which has lead them to a state of entrenching defensiveness about their behavior. However, within a safe, empathetic, environment, the patient can use feedback to explore how their thoughts and actions have affected their lives. Patients, like all of us, are better at making decisions when they can see their patterns of thinking and behaving more clearly.

They assess patients. Therapists are trained to assess the "bio-psycho-social" or the "biological, psychological, and social" context of a patient historically and currently. It is important to note that assessment is not a discrete activity that occurs during the first visit. It is a continual process that unfolds over time. Therapists assess the strengths, beliefs, coping mechanisms, safety (in terms of suicidality and homicidality), security (in terms of housing and food), and presenting or historical symptoms of behavioral health difficulties (including substance abuse) of a patient and much more. Assessment, by nature, depends on self-disclosure, so its quality and accuracy depends entirely on the ability of the therapist to elicit information from the patient. This means that the therapist must create a strong therapeutic alliance within just a few seconds or minutes. Guided, open-ended, questions are the gold standard of assessment. For this reason, a skilled clinical interview should always replace written assessment tools whenever possible. While one of the goals of assessment is to identify a proper diagnosis, it is rarely the main goal. The goal of an assessment is to continually get a sense of a patient as a whole person and to direct interventions in the way that will be most helpful to them.

They diagnose. All therapists are trained in DSM-V diagnosis. In the field of behavioral health, diagnosis has historically been suspect. Many have seen it as being driven largely by insurers and/or health plans, and as being used as a marginalizing "label" for patients, and as being somewhat unnecessary since pharmacological treatment is often based on symptoms and not a diagnosis. However, it is important to recognize that a diagnosis can be an important part of a patient's care when it informs treatment. It can be helpful for a team communicating with Electronic Medical Records, as it indicates a cluster of specific symptoms to all treatment

team members. It can inform other treatment decisions, such as when a diagnosis of alcohol dependence indicates that some other medications to treat chronic pain would be unsafe. Diagnosis can also be an important way to provide educational material to patients about the signs, symptoms and treatment of their condition. In this sense, it can facilitate self-management and empowerment. Lastly, for some patients, having a name for what has been troubling them is freeing. It may provide validation to them that their suffering is "real", that it is recognizable to others, and that there is hope for a treatment or solution to their suffering. Behavioral health providers should share and talk about diagnosis only as much as it is meaningful to the patient.

TIPS FOR MEDICAL PROVIDERS WORKING ON A TEAM WITH BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDERS

Who to refer? ALMOST ANYONE! Research tells us that 70% of patients in a primary care setting want or need behavioral health intervention. In addition to severe mental illness, high scores on screening tools, and patients who request behavioral health services, here are some other examples to start with:

- Depression, including dysthymia (therapy is first line treatment)
- Anxiety, all types (therapy is first line treatment)
- Nicotine Dependence
- Obesity (behavioral health can r/o binge eating disorder or eating disorder NOS; can assess childhood abuse that is connected to weight/body image, provide motivational interviewing to increase behavior change success)
- Patients with chronic diseases that are not well managed (behavioral health clinicians are usually experts in behavior change techniques such as motivational interviewing)
- Substance abuse, including ETOH (research shows 20% of patients misuse alcohol).
- Children, to dx ADHD (behavioral health clinicians can administer and score Vanderbilt's and do clinical interview)
- Parents of ADHD kids for parent directed therapy re: behavioral interventions for ADHD support
- Parents with high needs children
- First time parents to assess stressors
- Chronic Pain (CBT is evidenced based adjunct treatment)
- Patients who have low acceptance of their chronic pain or other chronic disease
- Patients who are angry at their PCP or care team
- Patients who have lost someone close to them
- Patients that have yelled or otherwise treated staff/providers poorly, and need to be warned about the consequences of their behavior
- Anything involving feelings, beliefs or behavior!

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL TEAM:

- Your therapist is a trained professional, and therapy is a highly skilled treatment modality; avoid referring to therapy or psychological assessment as something you just “don’t have time to do”. This can feel devaluing to your behavioral health clinician, even though of course it isn't meant to be. This is like a behavioral health provider saying they could diagnose and treat diabetes if they had time

- Behavioral health clinicians are providers -- it is helpful to be conscious of informal and formal indications of this. For example, if the providers are pooling money for Christmas gifts for support staff, ask the behavioral health clinicians to donate money, as opposed to including them in the gifts for the staff.
- Similarly, it is important that behavioral health providers are mandatory attendees at provider meetings, to increase the cohesion of the integrated healthcare team, and to encourage informal and formal communications between medical and behavioral health professionals.
- It is helpful to have direct conversations with the behavioral health clinician on your team about how best to communicate about patients- in person and in the EHR. What do you want clearly in the notes for chronic pain patients? Do you want an alert when patient is ETOH dependent? The more the behavioral health clinician knows about how to help you help patients, the better.
- Behavioral health clinicians cannot advise about what psychotropic to prescribe or not prescribe, it is out of their scope. They can only give assessment information that can help with decision making including what patient has tried before, response to trials, what medication family members may have had success with, what medications patient believes will help them and which ones they believe will harm them.

TIPS FOR REFERRING:

- Ideally the whole team is empowered to refer without asking you first. The receptionist, the medical records person, and especially your MA and nurses. Not only does it indicate they are a valuable member of the care team, it also speaks to the fact that patients often disclose more about their difficulties to staff members. To this end...
- It can be useful to create something similar to "standing orders" for staff referrals, also referred to as "standardized clinical pathways". For example, all new patients who have chronic pain as chief complaint, all pregnancies under 17, all ADHD children and adults, all PHQ-9s over 10, all GAD7 over 10, positive CAGE-AID, all children with stomach aches, and other conditions where there is an evidence base of the positive impact of behavioral health intervention, are automatically referred to behavioral health. This is a foundational population health practice, to improve outcomes in a defined group of people.
- Sometimes it can be helpful to avoid the word "counselor" or "therapist" in an initial referral conversation with a patient. These can be high stigma words, and can be more effective to use the word "colleague" or "stress specialist" or something similar.
- It can be useful to think of wording referrals to behavioral health clinicians as "treatment". Although therapy is a first line treatment for many conditions, patients often don't know this, and have little confidence in how "talking to a stranger" could help them. Conveying your confidence to patients that behavioral health is a treatment for their difficulties, not just a 'friendly ear' can increase the likelihood the patient will go, and increase their expectation that they will obtain help from the visit.
- No show rates for behavioral health clinicians, even in a primary care setting are very high for first appointments. Even if the behavioral health clinicians doesn't have time for a session with the patient on the same day you see them, just introducing the patient to the behavioral health clinicians will increase the likelihood that the patient will show for the appointment.

COMMUNICATION AND THE HEALTHCARE TEAM

COMMUNICATING WITH MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS AND THE HEALTHCARE TEAM

Genuine relationships on the healthcare team are the foundation of an effectively functioning integrated behavioral health system. When team members understand and trust each other, they create an environment where everyone is motivated to mutually learn from one another, adopt a common belief system, and embrace practice change. Face-to-face interactions about patient care issues increase communication between team members, however it is the more informal conversations (both work related and non-work related) that allow co-workers to gradually begin self-disclosing and engaging in vulnerable questioning and affective expression. These interactions build quality relationships, which in turn have a direct impact on patient safety and care outcomes, not to mention, employee job satisfaction.

Generally speaking, the difference in communication styles between medical providers and behavioral health clinicians stems from the fact that medical providers are usually “task driven” while behavioral health clinicians are usually “relationship driven”. This means that, in general, medical providers value conclusions and solutions to tasks and problems. They prefer short and straightforward answers and recommendations as opposed to longer discussions concerning what is clinically compelling about a patient. On the other hand, behavioral health clinicians tend to prefer to focus on problems as they stem from the complexity of human behavior. This involves the curious exploration of a person’s problems through longer discussions and relationship building.

In an integrated environment with employees who are comfortable communicating with one another, each style can be valuable and compliment the other. Below are some general tips about how to facilitate productive and positive communication within the healthcare team.

MODELING EVIDENCED-BASED SKILLED COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES:

In order to begin building quality relationships within the healthcare team, the behavioral health clinician can model the very evidence-based communication skills they use with their patients. Although they may not be used as extensively by medical providers, these communication practices are also considered to be the “gold standard” in the medical field, since they are proven to yield superior treatment outcomes, increase provider satisfaction, and improve patient experience. While there are many evidenced-based communication techniques, a brief list of some is below:

1. Open-ended questions
2. Reflective listening
3. Acknowledging feelings
4. Conveying Empathy
5. Affirming Strengths

Consciously practicing these techniques with colleagues will not only increases the behavioral health provider's skill, but it will also encourage other team members to use the skills as well.

MAXIMIZING PROVIDER FOCUSED CONSULTATION:

Maximizing provider-focused consultation is the ability of the behavioral health clinician to respond to the provider's feelings, needs, and beliefs when they are asking about a patient. Properly attending to the provider's feelings in the short term will yield larger gains for patients in the future, as it can help shape how they think about patients with behavioral health conditions and even shape their entire belief system. Behavioral health clinicians may do this by pausing before responding to a question about a patient, taking stock of the provider's emotional state, and then attending to their feelings. From there, the behavior health clinician can elicit thoughts and opinions about the patient's condition from the provider. This will facilitate information sharing and mutual learning, which will subsequently enhance their relationship.

For example, a medical provider may come to a behavioral health clinician and express that they are very frustrated because a patient is demanding medication, referrals, and testing that the provider believes are unnecessary. Perhaps the patient has a diagnosis of depression, is nicotine dependent, and has a history of polysubstance dependence. The primary care provider may ask the behavioral health clinician to go talk to the patient, which the behavioral health clinician will ultimately do. However, before they do so, they would address and validate the provider's feelings by saying something like "yea that sounds very frustrating, I can understand why you feel that way". The behavioral health clinician may follow by asking open-ended questions about the provider's experience to get more information, such as "can you tell me more about how it feels when you are in the exam room?" and then continue by probing for the provider's opinions by saying "what do you think you would like to do with this situation?". After the behavioral health clinician has heard the thoughts and feelings of the providers, they can ask to give information respectfully by saying something like, "can I give you a thought on this?". The behavioral health clinician can then give them any relevant information about how to proceed with the patient.

PROVIDING INFORMATION THROUGH SKILLED COMMUNICATION:

One of the most rewarding parts of working on a team is the personal and professional growth that occurs as a result of learning from other team members. The osmosis of knowledge between team members can significantly affect how one practices individually and collectively. Behavioral health clinicians can provide information on a variety of important topics and specifically demonstrate that *the way* in which information is communicated is just as important as the information itself. The following are examples of areas in which a behavioral health clinician's expertise and communication skills might be particularly valuable to the team.

- Many medical providers are not particularly knowledgeable about therapy. They may not know what happens in therapy sessions or know that it is a first line treatment for the most common behavioral health conditions, many of which intersect with medical conditions. As it comes up in patient care conversations, it is important for the behavioral health clinician to educate other providers about therapy as an evidenced-based treatment. To do this, the therapist might ask the provider what they already know about therapy, validate and reinforce what they already know, and then provide new information. Beyond educating their co-workers, this also allows the therapist to model effective communication strategies. For helpful "tips" sheets directly addressing primary care givers' knowledge and perceptions of behavioral health clinicians and services, see "What Does a Therapist Actually Do?" and "Tips for Medical Providers Working on a Team With Behavioral Health Providers" in [the section above](#).
- Many medical providers are not aware of how traumatic childhood experiences can lead to chronic diseases and generally poor health outcomes as adults. Although many of the medical professions are now teaching Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and related research in their

curriculums, the behavioral health provider might be the first line of knowledge for information about the social determinants of health. Whenever appropriate, the behavioral health clinician should share this expertise, as it can enrich the other provider's insight and empathy in patient care. A therapist might do this by first empathizing and acknowledging a provider's frustration with a patient who has multiple chronic conditions and then use skilled communication strategies to provide them with new information about the possible social determinants of that person's health condition.

- Many times, addictive disorders are misunderstood as problems of willpower, character, parental failings, and the like. Moreover, there are many myths about the drugs themselves, such as illicit drugs having more addictive potential than alcohol or tobacco. Behavioral health clinicians can provide meaningful, research-based, information to the medical team about addictive disorders as it comes up in patient care conversations. The behavioral health clinician might do this by first asking the provider open-ended questions to elicit their thoughts and beliefs are about addictive disorders and then provide them with new information.
- Related to the above, like most of us, many primary care providers have had experiences with mental health issues or addictive disorders within their own families, or perhaps, themselves. When providers disclose this to the behavioral health clinician, they can respond with compassion, skilled empathy, and respectfully share any helpful information that would be appropriate.
- It is not uncommon for primary care providers to ask the behavioral health clinician for advice about what psychotropics to prescribe. It is important for the behavioral health clinician to stay within their scope of work and refrain from making medical or medication recommendations. To this end, it can be helpful for the behavioral health clinician to educate the medical team about their responsibilities and limits. When discussing medication however, it can be helpful for the behavioral health clinician to provide information about the patient's belief system surrounding medication, what they may have tried in the past, what they may want to try now, and what other family members may have used successfully. To do this, the behavioral health provider might start by acknowledging the provider's willingness to collaborate (affirmation of strengths) and then provide their insights.

COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD:

For most behavioral health clinicians, face-to-face interactions tend to be limited to the healthcare team they work with on a daily basis. However, even these face-to-face interactions can be limited in time or an inefficient way to communicating about a patient's care. The Electronic Health Record (EHR) subsequently becomes the primary way for a team to communicate about the vast majority of patient-related issues and care decisions. Although it can be seen as a convenient and easy way to communicate, clinicians should be particularly careful and thoughtful about what is written in the EHR. This is because whatever is written in the EHR has direct impacts on the readers' understanding of behavioral health, patient safety, and the quality of care. To this end, it is important to avoid the use of high judgment and stigmatizing phrases such as "drug seeking", "lying", "non-compliant", "unreliable reporter", "resistant", etc. Conversely, the EHR can be a way to consciously communicate empathy, understanding, and promote whole-person care. Behavioral health clinicians can continue to lead the advancement of this culture change by taking care to chart the patient's values, strengths, and successes, within the EHR. With this, every clinician should also remember that whatever is written in the EHR is essentially permanent, could potentially be seen by the patient, and could even be subpoenaed in court. Most organizations will have some level of standardization or training about their specific charting guidelines, but the following are some general standards for using the EHR.

- Behavioral health records should be integrated with medical and substance use records whenever the services are being offered at the same organization. While this challenges some individuals' and organizations' historical belief systems about sharing information, there are no legal or ethical reasons for records not to be integrated. Moreover, when there are legal or ethical concerns, they can be addressed through reasonable system changes, such as including behavioral health and substance abuse services in consent to treat documents, as well as on Releases of Information ([An Introduction to Operational Integration](#)).
- When records are integrated, it is important for the organization to clearly communicate this to the patient on the first visit. By doing this the clinician can address any of the patient's concerns, discuss charting norms, and remind them about HIPPA's "need to know" mandate. There may be times when a patient will prefer to receive behavioral health services elsewhere as a result. Although this is rare, it is important that patients are given all appropriate information about how their records will be shared ([Documentation and billing](#)).
- A behavioral health clinician's diagnosis of a patient should appear on any shared problem or diagnosis list. This means that a diagnosis of panic disorder would appear alongside a diagnosis of COPD or diabetes. This is the most basic way to communicate important patient information. While most EHR software make creating shared self-management goals or care plans very difficult, creating shared problem or diagnosis lists is usually quite simple.
- Actual narrative charting should be respectful of a patient's privacy. Documentation of counter transference, extensive details about a patient's marital difficulties, sexual history, childhood trauma, or any other delicate subjects are rarely necessary to include in the EHR. The EHR should be reserved for only the clinical information necessary to keep a patient safe or enhance their quality of care.
- There should be an established, standardized, system, within the organization, for communicating health information that might be urgent or impact the patient's safety. For example, when a patient discloses severe alcohol dependence to the behavioral health clinician and the clinician realizes that the patient is also being prescribed benzodiazepines and opioids, there should be a system that "alerts" or "flags" this to the prescribing provider.

COMMUNICATING WITH RECEPTIONISTS AND MEDICAL ASSISTANTS:

Receptionists tend to be the "right hand" of behavioral health clinicians. For many, the receptionist is the only support staff the behavioral health clinician has and are the staff member that the behavioral health clinician interacts with the most (sometimes as often as between every patient they see). Medical Assistants are also often particularly important members of the team for behavioral health clinicians. At some organizations the Medical Assistants, although not explicitly working with the behavioral health clinician, provide the warm hand-offs, clinical communication, interpretation, and other general support that the behavioral health provider needs. Both the receptionist and medical assistants are seen as true "health team members" to the behavioral health clinician and for this reason, communication with them takes particular thoughtfulness and care.

- Modeling skilled communication when interacting with receptionists and Medical Assistants is as important as it is with medical providers. Not only is it kind and respectful, it also models the very skills behavioral health providers want them to use with patients.
- Staff-focused consultation is similar to provider-focused consultation. When receptionists come to the behavioral health clinician with concerns about a patient, perhaps a patient's behavior,

rudeness, eccentricities, flirtations, or other behavior, the behavioral health clinician can begin by exploring their needs and wants by providing validation, empathy, and reflective listening before moving on to focus on the particular patient at hand. Particularly with support staff, focusing on their strengths and encouraging confidence will build their interpersonal skills and ability to communicate with an increasingly wider variety of patients.

- Behavioral health clinicians are sometimes the first therapists a Medical Assistant or receptionist has ever met. Subsequently how a behavioral health provider talks about behavioral health concerns will have a significant impact on how other staff will perceive patients with behavioral health conditions and the field of behavioral health at large. For this reason, it is the responsibility of the behavioral health clinician to model empathy, compassion, understanding, and the very skills taught to patients in therapy (feelings identification and expression, self-acceptance and self-care, etc.).
- Workplace culture is different in each organization, however it is not uncommon for healthcare organizations to allow little autonomy for staff to make their own decisions, treating them more like robotic taskers than empowered team members. While behavioral health providers may not be able change the whole culture of an organization (or at least not quickly!), they can explicitly encourage the autonomous decision making of staff and thereby treat them as an important member of the healthcare team. The behavioral health clinician may facilitate this by saying something like, "When you call this patient back, go ahead and make whatever decision you think is best after you talk to her. If you think she needs to be squeezed in, just let me know." or "What do you think works best for no-shows? I know it affects your work and you are probably the one who deals with this the most, so I'd be curious to hear your opinion." The benefit of having empowered, autonomous, decision makers cannot be overestimated. When it is welcomed in the organization's environment, it builds trust, communication, and quality relationships, which all ultimately effect patient care outcomes.

WARM HAND-OFFS, COOL HAND-OFFS, AND STEP-INS: PHILOSOPHY, PROCEDURES, AND RELATED COMMUNICATION

WARM HAND-OFFS:

Philosophy: The “warm hand-off”, simply put, is the practice of one healthcare provider introducing a patient to another healthcare provider with the hopes of connecting them to a new service. While the warm hand-off is most often used in reference to a medical provider handing off a patient to a behavioral health clinician, warm hand-offs can occur between anyone at a given organization or even between providers at different organizations. The hand-off occurs during the course of the visit and usually involves the original provider walking the patient over to the new provider (or bringing the new provider over to the patient), allowing them to meet face-to-face, instead of just making a referral for the future. There is no time requirement for the length of the hand-off – it could consist of a 15-20-minute consultation or an official first session but it could also simply be a 5 minute introduction that leads to another appointment being set up in the future.

The warm hand-off seeks to address many of the barriers that patients face in obtaining behavioral health services. No show rates for first appointments can be as high as 60% for behavioral health services, reflecting the stigma around receiving mental healthcare, transportation and childcare issues, and apprehension or fear of a therapist. The warm hand-off, therefore, becomes a skillful way to connect the patient with the new provider when they are already in the clinic. This not only eliminates any barriers that might prevent the patient from being able to return at a different time for a new appointment but it also builds comfort, trust, and rapport between the patient and the therapist. With this, it can be an efficient and effective way to provide services in real-time, when a patient is ready and willing to receive care, and/or when the medical team needs assistance with the patient.

Procedures: When an organization chooses to embrace the warm hand-off as a standard practice, they must take care to consider how it will work with their existing procedures and scheduling. This is because warm hand-offs are, by nature, unpredictable and unscheduled, their frequency varies between organizations and providers, and there isn't a “one size fits all” template for scheduling them into care visits. Some questions to consider before developing procedures about warm hand-offs are:

- Is there sufficient behavioral health staffing to sustain warm hand-offs (re: the ratio of behavioral health clinicians to primary care providers)? If the staffing is insufficient, utilizing the warm hand-off technique becomes almost impossible, as the behavioral health clinician receiving the warm hand-off, will be overwhelmed with referrals from multiple medical providers and staff. This will leave them with insufficient time to respond to all of the inquiries while also doing their scheduled therapy sessions with existing patients. When staffing is insufficient (generally, less than 1 behavioral health clinician to every 2-3 medical providers), it may be worth considering not adopting the warm hand-off practice or pairing the behavioral health provider with a single healthcare team (such as only one primary care provider and their staff), until sufficient behavioral health staffing is achieved.
- How will interruptions to the behavioral health provider and the patient they are currently seeing be handled? Some behavioral health clinicians do not want any interruptions at all and may instead schedule some time in-between each session for warm hand-offs. In this case, the medical team may ask the patient to wait a bit longer in order to meet the behavioral health provider. Other behavioral health clinicians manage interruptions well (providing that there aren't

so many that it makes focused therapy impossible), developing skills to minimize their impact on the current patient, while communicating briefly to the medical team when they will be available.

- How will the healthcare team communicate that they need the behavioral health clinician for a warm hand-off? Will the providers text each other, knock on doors, use pagers, flags on exam room doors? There are many different options and health teams can develop the strategies that work best for them.
- What happens after the behavioral health clinician is notified about the need for a warm hand-off? Will the provider respond immediately or will they finish their current session with another patient? Organizations and individual therapists (in collaboration with their healthcare team) can decide what works best for them. Some therapists may choose to let the medical assistant or primary care provider know how much longer they will be in their current session and ask if the warm hand-off patient can wait until they are done. Other therapists may choose to leave their current session briefly to complete an introduction with the warm hand-off patient. With this, organizations, therapists, and healthcare teams will also need to be flexible and make different decisions for each situation, depending on the time available, the urgency, the patients schedule, etc.
- Who will actually do the warm hand-off? In some organizations, the medical provider introduces the patient to the behavioral health provider. In other organizations, other staff members might regularly engage in the warm hand-off. Generally speaking, patients are more likely to get the behavioral health services they need if organizations encourage all staff to utilize the warm hand-off technique.
- What are the protocols around billing and documentation? Billing and documentation for warm hand-offs bring a distinct level complexity. As stated above, warm hand-offs happen, by definition, on the same day as another medical appointment and vary in length from a quick introduction to a full session. This not only poses issues with billing in the state of California but it also poses issues with the EHR, where documentation is usually tied to billing. It can be hard to document in the EHR without billing, but when a warm hand-off involves some level of assessment or intervention (even if it is only 10 minutes long) documenting what happened is important. Organizations will likely need to develop their own protocols for when to document and bill for warm hand-offs.

Related communication: Primary care providers typically have their own style of communicating and have different relationships with different patients. These, among other factors (especially cultural considerations), make each warm hand-off different, individualized to best help a particular patient overcome any barriers to accessing behavioral health services. However, some general principles can be articulated:

- A primary care provider's referral to a behavioral health clinician should be the same as any other referral they would normally make to another service. For example, there should be no discernable difference in the content or tone of a referral made to a behavioral health clinician and a referral made to a cardiologist. Patients can pick up on the implied level of importance a provider is placing on a referral and will respond accordingly.
- Unless a patient has used a diagnostic term themselves such as, "I feel depressed", "I had a panic attack", or "I'm addicted", it is more effective to use general terms like "stress" to refer to a behavioral health problem. Later on, the behavioral health clinician will have the time to skillfully assess a patient's readiness to identify themselves as having particular problems and can work with them to de-stigmatize these terms whenever necessary.

- Similarly, it can be more effective to use general terms such as “colleague” or “someone who specializes in” instead of “counselor”, “therapist”, or “social worker”. For many patients these terms evoke stigma, fear, and misunderstanding, especially patients who have not received behavioral health services in the past. Beyond threatening the therapeutic alliance, they may even keep a patient from seeing a behavioral health clinician at all. Skilled behavioral health clinicians are able to appropriately identify themselves and intervene to address any issues the patient may have with their professional background. Along the same lines, a primary care provider is generally more effective at referring a patient who does not have a history of accessing behavioral health services or did not request behavioral health services, when they ask or offer a patient “education”, “ideas”, or even “support” instead of “counseling”.

Example Script 1- Primary Care Provider Referring Patient to Behavioral Health Services:

PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER: *“It sounds like you might be experiencing a lot of stress right now. That can be so difficult. I work with someone who specializes in helping with these issues and I would like you to speak with them today to better help me help you. Is it alright with you if I introduce you to her/him?” (Waits for response from patient). “Great, let me go see if they are available to pop in right now.”*

Example Script 2 - Medical Assistant Referring Patient to Behavioral Health Services:

MEDICAL ASSISTANT: *“From some of your answers on this questionnaire, it looks as if you may be feeling down lately. We have someone here who can give you some ideas of ways to help with this. [Her/His] office is just down the hall, would you be interested in meeting with [him/her]?” (Waits for response). Great, let me go see if [he/she] is available to meet you.”*

The following are two sample scripts for behavioral health clinicians or primary care providers who are referring patients to a psychiatrist. Both address the major barriers of achieving a successful psychiatric consultation - stigma and fear regarding the implications of seeing a psychiatrist and misunderstandings about the role of a psychiatrist. Because of how they have been documented in history, patients commonly assume psychiatrists are super competent, specialized analysts, who will engage with them in intensive therapy. Many patients feel disgruntled, ignored, and even angry by very competent and kind psychiatrists, when they feel they “only” received an assessment and a prescription.

Example Script 1 - Primary Care Provider Referring a Patient to Psychiatry - High Levels of Stigma:

PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER: *“We have already tried 3 medications that have not seemed to work for you and I know that has been very frustrating. We have a specialist here who is a doctor for [anxiety/depression/voices] and may be able to change your medicine or find something that works better for you. [He/She] is right here and could see you next week. Is that okay?” (Waits for agreement from patient). “Great, if you would like, I can walk you up to reception and they can help you make an appointment.”*

Example Script 2 - Primary Care Provider Referring a Patient to Psychiatry – Long History With Mental Health Services:

PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER: *“You have a long history of struggles with this problem and since you are a new patient to me, I am wondering if you would be willing to see our specialist to make some recommendations about medicine. [She/He] is just a doctor, so they don't do counseling, they will only be assessing and addressing your medications. I do have a colleague that is a*

counselor and I think [he/she] could be helpful to you, as well. Is it okay with you if I make two appointments for you, one that is for medications and one that is for counseling? (Waits for agreement from patient) "Great, I'll go ahead and do that and then I can follow up with you in about two weeks. How does that sound?"

COOL HAND-OFFS:

Philosophy: Although it is always best-practice to utilize a warm hand-off in real time, occasionally barriers arise that prevent a medical provider from being able to connect a patient to a behavioral health provider that same day. For example, sometimes a behavioral health provider is not available at the time the PCP might need them because they are meeting with other patients or already committed to another warm hand-off with another medical provider. Other times the patient may have every desire to meet with a behavioral health provider but be unable to wait, even for 5-10 minutes, to speak with a provider that day. "Cool hand-offs" aim to bridge that gap for patients who are interested in behavioral health services but unable to participate in a warm hand-off that day.

Procedures: In cool hand-offs the medical provider meeting with the patient is responsible for assessing the patient's behavioral health need and communicating how a behavioral health provider could be helpful to them. When the patient agrees that they would be interested in engaging in behavioral health services but no behavioral health provider is available for a warm hand-off, there are generally two courses of action for the medical provider. If they know that the patient will need to come back for more follow up appointments in the weeks to come, they can "schedule" a warm hand-off and ensure that a behavioral health provider is ready when the patient comes back. This is typically done in the same way a regular warm hand-off would be initiated – with a medical provider texting, calling, messaging, or flagging down a behavioral health provider at the beginning of the day that the patient is scheduled to come in again (or even a few days before) to ensure someone will be available at the specific time of their appointment. The other option is to set up a referral pathway for the behavioral health provider to outreach to the patient to schedule an appointment. However, this comes with a disclaimer.

Remember that the warm hand-off is always the gold standard. It works because, as said above, by meeting the therapist face-to-face before beginning services, no show rates are reduced, stigma and fear of receiving behavioral health services is relieved, and there are no barriers to getting the patient into the office because they are already there. For this reason, care should be taken by medical providers in making cool hand-offs via phone outreach. If a client seems eager to leave the office once a warm hand-off is mentioned, they may not be at a stage of change where they are ready to accept behavioral health services, even if the medical provider thinks they need them. Making a cold-hand-off in this case may not lead to any success, as the patient may appease the behavioral health provider who is reaching out to them by making an appointment, but not showing or avoid their calls all together. If a patient has no-showed for a behavioral health appointment before, may be a better idea to make a note in their chart for the next time they come into the office to re-assess for their readiness to engage in behavioral health services and ensure a behavioral health clinician is ready for a warm or cool-hand-off at that time.

Related communication:

Example Script 1 – Medical Provider Scheduling a "Cool Hand-off" for the Next Appointment:

MEDICAL PROVIDER: *"I'm really glad you've told me a little bit more about how the stress of losing your father is affecting you and that you would be interested in talking to one of the counselors we have here. They are all wonderful and I'm confident they could be helpful to you as you go*

through the grieving process. I'm sorry that none of them are available to come in right now to meet with you today, but I'm wondering if we could set aside some time next week when you come back for us to take a look at your lab results? If you're open to it, I could make sure one of them is available to talk to you at that time. (pause for agreement) Great. I'll make sure to introduce you to one of them when you're back next Tuesday."

Example Script 2 – Behavioral Health Provider Calling a Patient Referred Through a “Cool Hand-off”:

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDER: *"Hi, is this Mr. Jones? (verify identity of patient) My name is Elizabeth and I'm a counselor at Southern Community Clinic who works with Dr. Gomez's team. She mentioned to me that you were here the other day and were interested in talking to a counselor about some of the stress you are going through right now. (pause for agreement and/or assess their interest in counseling services) I'm sorry I couldn't meet with you that day to introduce myself and learn more about what is going on, but I'm hoping that we can schedule a time for you to come in, maybe next week, and we could talk more? Great, I'll transfer you to the receptionist so that she can help you make an appointment with me".*

STEP-INS:

Philosophy: A step-in refers to when a behavioral health provider goes into a medical exam room without the patient asking for a behavioral health provider and without the doctor introducing the behavioral health provider to the patient. In some ways, it is like what someone working in sales might call a “cold call”. The vast majority of behavioral health providers have never performed this sort of intervention in the past and may feel uncomfortable when starting this sort of practice or hesitant that the patient will not accept their good-will. This is totally normal! Outside of mandated treatment settings, the behavioral health field has largely been built on those who actively seek out services and make an appointment to come in and see a therapist. Ethically, behavioral health providers also believe in self-determination and the right for patients to choose to engage or not engage in behavioral health services in accordance with their values and preferences. In integrated settings to date, the behavioral health field has been built on those who agree to behavioral health intervention after being introduced to the idea by their primary care team. The problem with relying exclusively on these philosophies of providing care is that we know most people who have behavioral health concerns in our communities that could benefit from treatment do not seek out services. The statistics show that the majority of patients walking into any given primary care clinic on a particular day have a behavioral health need. Even in the highest functioning integrated settings, only a fraction of these people will get seen. The step-in attempts to bridge this gap in supporting people with accessing to care. When done skillfully, it is a respectful way to talk to patients directly about behavioral health services and offer them the opportunity to engage. Step-ins avoid referral processes and reliance on the medical team's assessment of need. Step-ins can also be empowering to patients because it allows them to self-assess whether they need or want behavioral health services.

Procedures: To integrate step-ins into common practice at an organization, it is important to ensure the entire medical team understands and embraces it. This is actually usually easier than it sounds. Contrary to the popular belief that medical providers are territorial and do not wanting other providers to see “their” patient without their expressed “permission”, most medical providers are happy to have a behavioral health provider (who has specialized knowledge) engage with and help the patients on their panel, without them having to any extra work. Still, it is important for the behavioral health providers to collaborate with the medical providers at the organization in developing the technical aspects of step-in practices and procedures. Asking the medical providers what works best for them gains their buy in. Do they want the behavioral health provider to tell them they are going in to a certain exam room to ensure they stay out of rooms where a procedure may be taking place? Do they want the behavioral health provider to start at one end of the hall and work in a

certain direction? Do they prefer the behavioral health provider go in before or after they see the patient? Do they want a brief in person assessment from the behavioral health provider in real time? These types of questions facilitate useful discussions with the entire care team and solidify the collaborative spirit characteristic of integrated behavioral health settings.

Related communication:

Example Script 1: Behavioral Health Provider to Patient When No Known Behavioral Health Concern is Apparent:

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDER: *“Good Morning! My name is Elizabeth. I work on Dr. Gomez’s team (including important non-verbal cues such as soft, but direct eye contact, a welcoming smiling, and offering a hand for handshake - because this is an unexpected person coming into the exam room, goodwill non-verbals are of the utmost importance to convey warmth and empathy). I just wanted to introduce myself and let you know about some services we have here. Can I sit down?”*

(Pause and engage in purposeful connecting statements, such as “what’s your name?” or if a child is in the room, a friendly, “I love your dress/earrings/purse”. Only say these things they are true. Also consider gender congruency. If the patient has been waiting for you, say something like , ‘Thanks so much for waiting. I know being here for appointments sometimes seems to take forever.’) Then proceed:

“I’m a counselor here. I help people who might be struggling with stress - in any area of their life, really. I wanted to introduce myself to let you know we have people here like me, in case you ever want to talk to someone. Is talking to a counselor something you might be interested in?”

If sufficient warmth is conveyed, there is a 7 out of 10 chance that the patient will self-disclose something that is troubling them at this point in the interaction. If not, the connection can end shortly after this, with quick “thank you” and, ideally, a strength based compliment with an open invitation to access behavioral health services at the clinic at any time in the future.

Example Script 2: Behavioral Health Provider to Patient When the Medical Team Has Shared That a Possible Behavioral Health Concern Exists (but has not introduced the behavioral health provider to the patient, such as in a traditional warm hand-off):

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDER: *“Hi Mr. Fuente! My name is Elizabeth. I work with Jill (PA) and her team (the same non-verbal cues are important here again - eye contact, smiling, and offering hand a handshake). I hope you don’t mind, Jill mentioned you just left the hospital/are having anxiety/have had a really tough year (or any other applicable issue you were notified of). I’m a counselor here and I wanted to check in with you to see if you might want to share a little bit more with me about what has been going on for you?”*

SAMPLE SCRIPTS FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CLINICIANS REFERRING PATIENTS TO PRIMARY CARE

In many integrated systems, behavioral health services are only made available to patients who are also receiving primary care from the organization. Much of the time, this is due to a lack of behavioral health resources. Organizations are frequently unable to accommodate the behavioral health needs of current patients, let alone those of people who are not concurrently receiving medical care at the organization. Other times, clinicians simply feel that patients should be receiving medical care and behavioral health services under the same roof, as the quality of care is generally higher when care plans are managed by a team of healthcare professionals who are communicating about a patient's multiple, competing, needs.

However, it is important to note that many times, the behavioral health provider is the first person to have contact with a patient. When this happens it becomes the behavioral health clinician's responsibility to successfully refer the patient to a primary care provider, either to establish care or for a consult. The following are sample scripts for behavioral health clinicians and other front office staff who are making referrals to primary care providers in an integrated setting.

Script 1: Behavioral Health Clinician Establishing Care with a Primary Care Provider (Towards the end of session unless an appropriate opening is shown earlier in the visit):

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDER: *"Can we change course for a minute so I can give you some important information?" (Clinician waits for agreement from patient) "I know the call center/receptionist let you know that all patients who obtain behavioral health services here also receive medical care here. I wanted to ask you if you have thoughts about your preferences for doctors. I can make some recommendations if you would like." (Patient responds about any preferences they may have in regards to gender, age, location, or specialties) "Thank you for telling me that. I will walk you up to reception and they can help you make an appointment with a [female] primary care provider who works at this clinic. They will have access to my notes and I will make sure to write what you and I talked about – [that you need refills for your medications and an EKG to make sure there are no heart problems they need to follow up on since your recent ER visit]."*

Script 2: Behavioral Health Clinician Referring an Existing Patient Back to Primary Care (Towards the end of session unless an appropriate opening is shown earlier in the visit):

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDER: *"Can we change course just for a minute so that we can talk about our plan for next steps?" (Clinician waits for agreement). "You shared with me that [reiterate the medical problems the patient expressed, such as the medication not being effective or producing unwanted side effects, etc.]. It sounds like you would like to discuss this with your physician and, in that case, we can make an appointment for you to see [him/her] when you leave here today. How does that sound? (Clinician waits for agreement). Great, if you would like, I can walk you up to reception and they can help you make an appointment."*

Script 3: Behavioral Health Clinician Referring an Existing Patient Back to Primary Care - Alternate Reason for Referring (Towards the end of session unless an appropriate opening is shown earlier in the visit):

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CLINICIAN: *“When I look at your health record it looks like it has been over six months since you have seen your primary care provider. As we continue to work together on your [whatever their issues are], I think I would recommend that you see your primary care provider soon for a regular physical - just to make sure your problem [specify] is not being caused by another medical condition. What are your thoughts about this? (Clinician waits for agreement). Great, if you would like, I can walk you up to reception and they can help you make an appointment.”*

Script 4: Front Office, Reception, or Call Center Referring a Patient to Primary Care (Client calls inquiring about making an appointment with a behavioral health provider):

FRONT OFFICE, RECEPTION, OR CALL CENTER: *“I would be happy to make you an appointment with one of our behavioral health clinicians. Have you heard about also receiving medical care at our clinic? (Wait for patient's response). Can I give you some information about this? (Wait for agreement). At our organization, in order to see our behavioral health clinicians, patients actually also need to receive their medical care here. What are your thoughts about this? (Wait for agreement). Great! I would be happy to make you an appointment with one of our medical providers, as well.”*

FRONT OFFICE, RECEPTION, OR CALL CENTER (alternate): *“I would be happy to make an appointment with one of our behavioral health providers. I see you have not seen one of our medical providers. Have you heard about also receiving medical care at our clinic? (Wait for patient's response). Can I give you some information about this? (Wait for agreement). At our organization, we are an integrated system, which means in order to continue to see our behavioral health providers, patients also need to obtain their medical care here. Can I make you an appointment to establish care with one of our medical providers as well?” (Wait for agreement). Great! I would be happy to make an appointment with one of our medical providers, as well.”*

CLINICIAN RELATIONSHIPS WITH EMPLOYEES

One of the most significant differences between the medical healthcare culture and the behavioral healthcare culture concerns boundaries with patients and co-workers. While behavioral health clinicians are educated and trained to have fairly rigid boundaries with their patients, medical providers are known to treat the family members of their co-workers, accept gifts from patients, and even attend their dinners, parties, and graduations. The National Association of Social Workers' and American Psychological Association's codes of ethics specifically speak to "dual relationships", prohibiting them whenever exploitation could be possible, and in general, encouraging caution in establishing any dual relationship. Even behavioral health clinicians who interpret the codes of ethics very loosely, would still decline to provide therapy to a co-worker and would never attend a patient's social engagement, or accept a social media invite from a patient. The American Medical Association code of ethics, on the other hand, has no such prohibition (although in recent years, has released guidance cautioning medical providers against social media relationships with patients) causing the differences in boundary norms between medical and behavioral health providers to be evident immediately upon walking into an integrated setting.

While there is not necessarily a "right" answer to how behavioral health providers should develop relationships with their co-workers apart from always adhering to their professional code of ethics (NASW, AAMFT or APA), it is important for an organization to develop specific guidelines for how behavioral health providers will manage relationships with their co-workers or their co-workers' family members, when they may be patients as well.

THE CLINICIAN'S INFORMAL ROLE AS A BEHAVIORAL HEALTH EXPERT:

One of the greatest benefits of working in an integrated behavioral health setting is the impact behavioral health providers have on their co-workers. Through formal and informal interactions, behavioral health clinicians disseminate helpful knowledge to their co-workers and influence the culture of an organization. More specifically, behavioral health clinicians expand their co-workers' understanding of behavioral health issues. This is important because many medical providers and other staff have never had close contact with a behavioral health clinician and even fewer have utilized therapeutic services. In fact, research has proven that physicians have a much lower than average rate of utilization of therapy than the general population.

Behavioral health clinicians can answer questions about the causes and treatment of depression, addictive disorders, and chronic pain. They can help staff build greater compassion for those with personality disorders and schizophrenia. They can give information about effective parenting strategies and self-management strategies for panic attacks. Behavioral health clinicians who have an understanding of their role realize it as a huge responsibility - they have the potential to do exponential good, above and beyond the services they provide to patients.

Developing quality relationships with other staff members is one of the most important parts of working in an integrated setting and it is understandable that the combination of a close working relationship paired with the behavioral clinician's training as a therapist may lead to co-workers disclosing their own behavioral health concerns. They may share their worries about their children, asking the behavioral health provider for their opinion, disclose their own struggle with depression, or the fact that their husband is abusive. They may even disclose their histories of trauma or struggles with a family member who has a substance use disorder. Behavioral health providers, despite not providing formal treatment to their co-workers, can often be extremely helpful in these situations, simply by using their natural and learned skills of listening, eliciting, encouraging, normalizing and empathizing. Behavioral health providers can also share general information they may have about the condition, can recommend a course of action or suggest referrals. This type of friendly and caring

helpfulness typically comes naturally to behavioral health providers and they needn't shy away from the urge to engage with co-workers in this way, as there are clear differences between this and engaging a fellow employee in a formal course of therapy.

However, there are times where the line does not seem so clear. For example, when a co-worker comes into a behavioral health provider's office and sits on the couch, closes the door, and asks "can I speak to you confidentially?". These types of situations can indicate the need for clarifying roles and expectations before the co-worker moves forward in disclosures. The behavioral health provider can ask the co-worker to pause for a moment and share that they are happy to listen, but that their role would not be as a therapist, rather as a friend or co-worker, making sure that the co-worker understands they are not bound to the same conditions of confidentiality that they would be if the co-worker was a patient. By clarifying roles and expectations, the co-worker can then make a decision about how they would like to proceed.

This type of role will likely be familiar to behavioral health providers, as they often act in this role in their personal lives, being the person family members consult when someone needs treatment for a substance use disorder, help finding mental health or community resources for themselves or a friend, or just wants to talk about something that might be troubling them. Behavioral health providers usually understand that they can use their professional knowledge and training to be helpful to those they care about, while avoiding diagnosing or making other clinical judgements on those they have not assessed professionally.

Due to their skillset, behavioral health clinicians may also be utilized as the "de-briefing" expert after a crisis incident at work. The organization may ask the behavioral health clinician (or clinicians) to take on this role informally, for example asking the BH clinician to check in with staff after a frightening "code blue" incident or formally by including "crisis de-briefing" in the job description of the behavioral health clinicians, and protecting time for this activity. This is different than engaging with a staff member in a course of therapy, in two ways: first, the facilitation of a clinically based conversation is always after an incident at work (as opposed to someone's personal life) and second, it almost always involves more than one employee.

SEEING EMPLOYEES AND THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS AS PATIENTS:

Medical providers and staff are frequently unaware of the behavioral health clinician's guidelines and limitations for who they can provide services to. Some may refer co-workers, family members, or even ask to be seen themselves. If there is a policy in place within the organization that all employees are educated about, this will likely happen less often. However, if there is not a policy in place, it is usually up to the behavioral health clinician to decline the request for services in a way that preserves the relationship and helps the other person to understand that it is a rule or barrier in place that is set up to protect them. Understanding that there are no perfect scripts and that all communication happens in the context of the relationship and the organization's policies, here are some examples:

Script 1: Employee Wants to Receive Services from the Behavioral Health Clinician:

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDER: *"I'm honored that you trust me enough to want to see me for services. I wish I could. But we have a code of ethics that says we can't see people we know, which probably seems odd. It's because when we already know someone, we aren't as objective and helpful to them. Also having two different relationships with someone can get complicated. What you are describing to me sound really hard on you right now. Could I help you find another therapist that your insurance covers?"*

Script 2: Employee Wants a Family Member to Receive Services from the Behavioral Health Clinician:

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDER: *"I am touched that you trust me enough to see your [spouse, son, mother]. It sounds like what they are going through is really tough. Unfortunately, behavioral health clinicians normally don't see the immediate family members of people they have a relationship with. It probably seems odd since you would want your family member to see someone you know and trust, but it is just that things can get complicated in terms of confidentiality and even sometimes mandated reporting requirements. With that said, I would really like to help you find someone else they can talk to. Do you want me to help you find services elsewhere?"*

You can see from the above examples that it is much easier to decline the provision of services to a co-worker or their family members when the organization has a standardized policy in place. While the behavioral health clinician may still want to help the employee understand, the declination is apt to be received less personally when they have an organization's guidelines backing them up. For an example [Policy and Procedures for Employees and Family Members as Patients](#), see the appendix.

OPERATIONAL INTEGRATION

AN INTRODUCTION TO OPERATIONAL INTEGRATION

Operational integration refers to all of the “operations” necessary to facilitate and maintain integration at a healthcare organization. It encompasses everything from the written policies, practices and protocols around behavioral health services, to the releases of information necessary to provide behavioral healthcare to patients, to the physical and technological infrastructure necessary to keep behavioral healthcare up and running on a day to day basis. In a broader sense, however, operational integration is about parity of behavioral health and physical health. Parity doesn't mean behavioral health providers will make equal salaries to medical providers or have an equal number of dedicated support staff, it only means that the behavioral health of patients (including health behaviors, emotional health, mental health and freedom from substance use disorders) is considered *as important* as patients' physical health.

For most organizations, operational integration grows incrementally, after clinical service integration has begun. However, operational integration rarely happens naturally. In fact, without a purposeful intent to integrate operationally, the tendency is for organizations to develop separate infrastructure to support behavioral health and medical services. While a separate operational structure isn't necessarily problematic by definition, separate usually means inferior and insufficient. The result is often that the behavioral health services at a healthcare system seem to be more like a private practice within a medical system, rather than truly integrated. Behavioral health providers may be tasked with scheduling their own patients, calling their own no-shows, buying their own office or treatment supplies, and even drafting their own consent forms. The behavioral health providers may be in a separate electronic practice management (EPM) system or not use an EPM at all. They may not have regular data reports on productivity or even a pathway to obtain reports. They may not have any administrative support and instead manage copying, filing, letters and other administrative tasks themselves. Lack of operational integration can put the organization at risk in many areas and inadvertently creates and maintains the exact silos integration is hoping to dissolve.

In an effort to avoid or rectify these consequences, the integrated behavioral health field has made operational integration a top priority. Over the past decade, organizations have been working to thoroughly identify all of the different realms of operational integration to ensure behavioral health is embraced and supported on all levels.

COMPONENTS OF OPERATIONAL INTEGRATION:

Integrated forms: The organization's Consent to Treat and Releases of Information forms, include all services offered at an organization. Separate forms are not used for behavioral health and medical services. Examples of integrated [Consent to Treat](#) and [Release of Information](#) forms can be found in the appendix and highlight important themes, such as the differences in mandating reporting between medical and behavioral health providers and the release of records. While these examples have been approved by lawyers with healthcare expertise, organizations will want to consult with their own lawyers before implementing integrated forms.

Electronic Health Record Infrastructure: Behavioral health providers must be considered full providers in the EHR system and be able to chart in an integrated health record, without any firewalls or separate confidential tabs. Organizations should also have a behavioral health EHR trainer to support behavioral health providers. For more information on the electronic health record, and specifically, how behavioral health services are documented and billed to the EHR, see [Documentation and Billing](#).

Policies and Procedures: All policies and procedures become integrated, addressing both medical and behavioral health. For example, procedures for urgent psychiatric situations can be added to existing procedures for urgent medical situations. Similarly, behavioral health protocols can be added to existing protocols for triage, referrals, and call center guidance scripts. New policies may need to be created, such as an integrated records policy, or a policy to guide decisions on seeing employees as patients. Examples of these types of policies are in the appendix.

Integrated administrative support: All administrative support provided to medical providers and teams are proportionally (proportional to number of patients visits, typically) provided to behavioral health providers. This includes receptionist and call center support for scheduling or rescheduling, integration of behavioral health services into the organizations appointment reminder system and no-show follow up system, proportionally equal language interpretation and translation services, support for copying, filing, filling out forms and sending letters to and for patients, and equal assistance for referrals from the organization's referral clerks or center.

Integrated provider benefits and responsibilities: Behavioral health and medical providers have proportionally equivalent access to continuing education funds, training time, and administrative time. Behavioral health providers also have parity in responsibilities, such as attending all mandatory provider meetings, and having productivity expectations.

Community-facing Representation of Behavioral Health Services: Behavioral health services are on the organizations website, printed marketing material, community reports, posters, and other community-facing products. Behavioral health is also represented at any community outreach events, such a health fairs. Within the organization, behavioral health providers are identified the same way medical providers are. For example, if medical providers have their names on the door or wall of the site, and have business cards in the reception area, behavioral health providers have the same.

Behavioral Health Supplies: Behavioral health provider have a standard ordering process for their treatment supplies, just as medical providers have a standard ordering process for their equipment. The importance of supplies such as appropriate furniture and alternative lighting, as well as games or specific books for patients are treated as equivalent to stethoscopes, or exam tables for medical providers.

Integrated leadership: An organization has a Behavioral Health Director on the executive team. Behavioral health is explicitly included in the organization's mission statement and values. Within the organization's strategic plan, behavioral health goals are identified and included to the same degree medical care goals are. For more information on the importance of integrated leadership, see Integrated Behavioral Health Leadership.

Data and reports: Cost and revenue reports or other related financial data are run on the behavioral health department regularly, just as they are for medical departments. Productivity numbers for behavioral health providers, trends in no-shows or even presenting problems, are utilized to inform services. For more information on calculating behavioral health provider productivity, specifically see Behavioral Health Provider Productivity in Integrated Settings.

Recruiting behavioral health providers: The Human Resources department at an organization provides support in developing job descriptions, recruitment postings, and applications for behavioral health providers. HR also has a behavioral health informed hiring and selection process that is tailored to the specifics of practicing in an integrated setting. Recruitment and Hiring of Behavioral Health Providers, speaks to more of the details around hiring behavioral health providers in integrated settings and provides helpful examples of phrases to use in the recruiting and hiring process.

Behavioral health needs of all staff: Employee wellness campaigns proportionally represent behavioral health topics and the organization has an EAP (and encourages employees to utilize it). Staff de-briefing procedures are in place to provide support to staff after a critical incident, and leave of absences are monitored for trends, especially around behavioral health issues, as depression is the leading cause of disability world- wide. Work/life balance is considered an important topic, with ongoing productive discussions amongst leaders and staff about how to enhance their ability to thrive in both their personal and professional lives.

MULTI-LEVEL INTEGRATION DEPTH ASSESSMENT

This assessment is designed to support organizations in assessing the different levels and depth of their behavioral health integration efforts. One of the most potentially valuable uses of the tool is to prompt and guide a leadership team in discussing the current state of integration at their organization, including their strengths and weaknesses in various areas, and spark the development of a vision for their IBH goals. This assessment is designed to be used at specific points in time and throughout different intervals in the integration process to track progress towards organizational goals and is not meant to be thoroughly evaluative in spirit.

I. Integrated Services (Select one NUMBER for each characteristic)

1. Co-location of primary care services (PC) and behavioral health (BH) services

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<p>... does not exist; patients go to separate sites for physical health and behavioral health services.</p>	<p>... is minimal; but some conversations occur among different types of providers; established referral partners exist.</p>	<p>... is partially provided; multiple services are available at same site; some coordination of appointments and services.</p>	<p>... exists, with one reception area; appointments can be jointly scheduled; patients can obtain services from multiple disciplines at one site (medical, mental health, substance use); primary care and BH exam/consulting room are in close proximity.</p>						

How integrated are services? Not integrated for any patients 25% of clinic population 50% of clinic population Entire clinic population

2. Behavioral health conditions

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<p>... are not screened in this site; Only physical health and health behavior screening occurs.</p>	<p>... are occasionally screened; screening protocols are not standardized or are not audited to ensure consistent administration.</p>	<p>... screening for these conditions are integrated into care on a pilot or other limited basis; screening results are documented prior to treatment.</p>	<p>... screening tools are integrated into practice pathways to routinely assess BH/PC needs of all patients; standardized screening protocols are used and documented routinely to ensure consistent screening of all patients (including children) at requisite intervals.</p>						

Emotional/behavioral screening: Not used for any patients 25% of clinic population 50% of clinic population Entire clinic population

3. Substance use concerns (e.g., substance use disorders or risk for)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
. . . are not screened in this site; Only mental health or physical health screening occurs.	. . . are occasionally screened; screening protocols are not standardized or are not audited to ensure consistent administration.			. . . screening for substance use disorders (SUD) is integrated into care on a pilot or other limited basis; screening results are documented prior to treatment.				. . . screening tools are integrated into practice pathways to routinely assess the MH/SUD/PC needs of all patients; standardized screening protocols are used and documented routinely to ensure consistent screening of all patients at requisite intervals.	

Substance use screening: Not used for any patients 25% of clinic population 50% of clinic population Entire clinic population

4. Shared care plan(s) for medical care, substance use disorders care and mental health care

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
. . . do not exist.	. . . are separate and uncoordinated among service providers; occasional informal sharing of information occurs.			. . . providers have separate plans, but work in consultation; all services are documented in the same EHR or paper chart.				. . . are integrated and easily accessible and viewable as a single document to all providers on the healthcare team, as well as shared with patients and care manager. Plans are patient-centered and include patient’s overall wellness goals and the intended role of providers to achieve those goals.	

Shared care plans: Not used for any patients 25% of clinic population 50% of clinic population Entire clinic population

5. Care informed by best practices and current evidence base

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
. . . does not exist in a systematic way.	. . . depends on each provider’s own use of the evidence; some shared evidence-based approaches occur in individual cases.			. . . exists in the form of evidence-based guidelines, but are not systematically integrated into care delivery; use of evidence-based treatment depends on preferences of individual providers.				. . . follow evidence-based guidelines for treatment and practices; is supported through provider education and reminders; is applied appropriately and consistently. Processes are in place to ensure adherence to evidence-based practice guidelines.	

Evidence-based care: Not used for any patients 25% of clinic population 50% of clinic population Entire clinic population

6. Outcome measures regularly tracked in a population health tool/registry

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
... does not occur.	... occurs, but site does not have standard procedure in place to ensure all patients are assessed regularly; Outcomes are not used for treatment or care planning.			... occurs regularly, but are not always reviewed and discussed with patients. Outcomes are tracked and used to provide integrated treatment plans that address co-occurring medical and MH/SUD concerns.			... occurs for each patient’s medical and BH/SUD condition(s) regularly. Outcomes are monitored and used in development of shared care plan; outcomes are accessible in electronic systems for the entire healthcare team; Key providers meet with patient on regular basis to review progress and adjust treatments when outcomes are not achieved as expected or desired.		

Outcomes monitoring: Not used for any patients 25% of clinic population 50% of clinic population Entire clinic population

7. Patient/family involvement in shared care plan

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
... does not occur.	... is passive; healthcare team directs care with occasional patient/family input.			... is sometimes included informally in decisions about care; decisions about treatment are made collaboratively with some patients/families and their provider, but depends on preferences of individual providers.			... is an integral part of the system of care; collaboration occurs among patient/family and team members and takes into account family, work or community barriers and resources. Formal tools and means for ensuring patient and family involvement are integrated into practice, EHR and documents.		

Patient/family involvement: Not used for any patients 25% of clinic population 50% of clinic population Entire clinic population

8. Standardized clinical pathways

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
...do not exist	... informally exist, such as referral protocols for particular measures or conditions. Pathway are not standardized or audited to ensure consistency.			... are formalized in written protocols and practices for some conditions or measures; for example, SBIRT has been successfully implemented. Staff training on pathways occur regularly. Auditing is minimal.			... exist for multiple conditions and/or demographics, such as pregnancy, depression, obesity, chronic pain and depression/anxiety. Pathways are ‘standing orders’, meaning they occur automatically and are not dependent on primary care providers’ individual decision making. There is regular training of staff and providers on standardized		

pathway protocols, and regular auditing to ensure consistency.

Customized follow-up: Not used for any patients 25% of clinic population 50% of clinic population Entire clinic population

9. Patient Experience

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
... is not an explicit focus; patient experience is considered 'fluff' or 'extra' to the work of the clinic. No patient experience measurement or initiatives exist	... is measured due to grant or other regulations. Limited meaningful initiatives to address patient experience, such as one-time trainings; are in place, but no mention of patient experience in the strategic plan or QI goals; little understanding of the connection between patient experience and clinical outcomes.			... is measured regularly, data is shared and meaningful goals are set to improve patient experience. Strategic plan and QI has some mention of patient experience; understanding of the importance of patient experience varies drastically between teams, clinics and leadership members. Some deeper initiatives have been piloted on limited basis.				... is measures quarterly or more often; data is disseminated to all employees; there is a patient experience task force or leadership position that explicitly has responsibility for executing defined interventions to improve. The organization has a standardized customer service or empathic communication training for all employees; Trauma informed care is fully implemented.		

Customized follow-up: Not used for any patients 25% of clinic population 50% of clinic population Entire clinic population

10. Assessing patients strengths, preferences and social determinants of health (SDOH) (such as basic unmet needs)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
... does not occur.	... is limited. Information on relevant resources to meet needs is often a list or pamphlet of contact information.			... is considered. Some universal screening exists, for SDOH; assessment of strengths and preferences is variable between providers and teams.				... are universally in place and a system for coordinated referrals exists; patient strengths and preferences are elicited in a standardized fashion, by all teams; there is communication among sites, community resource organizations, and patients; Patients life goals and unmet needs are considered and the team systematically addresses them.		

Social determinants: Not used for any patients 25% of clinic population 50% of clinic population Entire clinic population

II. Practice/Organization (Circle one NUMBER for each characteristic)

1. Integration of executive leadership

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
... does not exist or leaders shows little interest; no BH Director	... is limited; executive leadership is supportive in a general way, but views this initiative as a "special project" rather than a change in usual care. A BH leader exists, but is a mid-level manager, answering to the CMO, COO (not CEO)			... is somewhat in place; A BH leader is a high level director and has authority and responsibility for the BH department, including protected administrative time for Director duties.			... is fully implemented, with a BH Director on the executive team, parity with CMO. In private practices, BH leaders are involved in all organization-wide clinical decisions, such as screening and standardized clinical pathways.		

2. Operational Integration

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
... does not exist. Separate operational processes for BH and Medical services are the norm.	... somewhat exists; BH and Medical providers share the same practice management system and the same appointment staff/practices. BH and medical providers attend the same provider meetings.			... is significant; in addition to using the same practice management system and appointment practices, the organization also has a one integrated consent to treat for all services, one release of PHI form for all services, and all policies and procedures are for integrated services, as opposed to separate P and Ps for each service.			... is fully implemented; in addition to everything listed in previous scoring box, all operational protocols for medical services are also in place for BH services, including administrative time allotments, incentive payments, continuing education benefits, office and treatment supply ordering protocols, support staff allocation, etc.		

3. Integrated, high functioning team practices

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
... do not exist. BH providers and medical teams work in separate siloes	... are informal; some members of some teams have strong relationships and communicate somewhat frequently; communication is not common in all teams, and few formal communication pathways exist. Hierarchy is in place, with titles being used and support staff limited in input.			... are thorough and there is communication and cohesiveness among members; some formal communication pathways exist; hierarchy is somewhat flat, with all team members able to offer opinions and insights freely.			... are fully in place; high frequency of informal communication between BH providers and medical teams, for example 'hallway consults' and texting, as well as formalized communication such as integrated huddles and case reviews. Hierarchy is flat; interactions of team members on integrated teams are characterized by high levels of trust and respect, with few exceptions.		

Integrated, high functioning team practices: No teams about 25% of teams 50% of teams All teams

4. Ratio of BH providers to medical providers

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
... is less than 1 BH FTE provider to 10 FTE medical providers.	... is less than 1 BH FTE provider to 5 FTE medical providers			... is less than 1 BH FTE provider to 3 FTE medical providers					... is less than 1 BH FTE provider to 2 FTE medical providers

5. Integrated mission, values and strategy

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
... does not exist. There is no mention of integration or BH services on any of the organization’s products, website, brochures or strategic plan.	... is included in some strategic initiatives, such as QI projects. Integration of BH is not included in the organizations mission, values or strategic plan, or the organization does not have these things. BH or integration may be mentioned on the website, or in some limited marketing materials.			... is explicitly included in the organization’s current strategic plan, as well indicated in one or more of the organization’s mission and values statements, however, there are no clear, agreed-upon goals, objectives or metrics associated with the strategy or mission/values. BH is mentioned in marketing materials, or website.					... is fully integrated into the organizations mission, values, and current strategic plan, as well as QI dashboards/metrics. All BH integration strategic goals are accompanied by specific goals, objectives and tasks, as well as measurements of goals. preferences are elicited and considered when making referrals. BH is clearly indicated as a core service in all marketing materials, websites, posters, phone trees, etc.

6. Employee Behavioral Health

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
... is not addressed in anyway	... is sometimes referred to informally in leadership meetings; BH clinicians may informally provide de-briefing or other work-related BH services to employees			... is addressed in employee wellness initiatives; is talked about openly within the context of employee well-being; an EAP exists, although it is under-utilized by employees Trauma informed Care may be talked about for patients, rarely in terms of employees.					... is addressed strategically as part of employee wellbeing. BH concerns are address in employee wellness initiatives, with stigma-decrease as a primary goal; EAP is highly utilized. TIC is implemented for patients and aspects of TIC are implemented for employees.

7. Integrated health records

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
... are based on paper records only; separate	... are shared among providers on an ad hoc or individual basis; multiple records exist for each patient; no aggregate data used			... there is one health record (paper or EHR) shared among the healthcare team, who all have access to the shared health record,					... are fully accessible to all staff and providers, with no firewalls or ‘confidential’ tabs for BH; team uses a registry or EHR to routinely track

records are used by each provider.	to identify trends or gaps.	treatment plan and lab/test results; team uses aggregated data to identify trends and launches QI projects to achieve measurable goals.	key indicators of patient outcomes and integration outcomes; the EHR has templates that easily support the documentation of common occurring co-occurring, medical and BH conditions (diabetes/depression, schizophrenia/diabetes/obesity).
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Integrated Health Records: Not integrated for any patients 25% of clinic population 50% of clinic population

Entire clinic population

8. Administrative and operational integration

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
... does not occur.	... occurs on a limited basis without routine follow-up or monitoring; methods mostly didactic.			... is provided for some team members using established and standardized materials, protocols or curricula; includes behavioral change methods such as modeling and practice for role changes; training monitored for staff participation.			... is supported and incentivized by the site for all providers; continuing education about integration and evidence-based practice is routinely provided to maintain knowledge and skills; job descriptions reflect skills and orientation to care coordination and integration.		

9. Financial health and sustainability

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
... does not exist. BH services are either totally grant dependent, or thought to be.	... somewhat exists. Organization has begun initiating credentialing and billing of BH providers; no financial modeling has been done. Total cost and total revenue are not known.			... exists. Organization is committed to financial sustainability of BH services, and has done initial financial modeling around this. BH Leader has shared responsibility for productivity of the BH department, and other aspects of financial sustainability. Costs and revenue are not run regularly.			... is detailed in a financial model. BH department is its own cost center, and costs/revenue are run regularly, for BH leader and other executives. Productivity, salaries, and other financial drivers are within the decision making authority of the BH leader, with CEO. Expansion and growth is not grant-dependent.		

Assessment from Elizabeth Morrison Consulting, Inc. Limited parts of this assessment were adapted from Maine Health Access Foundation (MEHAF).

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH STAFFING RATIOS

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH STAFFING RATIOS:

Although it is quite common for medical organizations to have well established staffing ratios in many areas (for example, the number of medical assistants per medical provider, the number of RN's per clinic, or the number of receptionists per total patient population), it is still uncommon to find established staffing ratios for behavioral health providers. This is understandable when considering that the IBH field had other operational priorities when first getting under way 15 years ago, however, it is an important structural commitment for mature IBH departments today. Even if organizations have not done it before, establishing behavioral health provider staffing ratios does not need to be intimidating. There are working models for calculating the appropriate amount of behavioral health providers needed at a given organization. Moreover, the staffing changes do not need to happen overnight. Ratios are put in place with the expectation that they provide clear guidance for future growth. By establishing staffing ratios an organization demonstrates a strong commitment to assessing for their patient population's behavioral health need and hiring the appropriate amount of providers to meet that need moving forward.

RISKS OF NOT ESTABLISHING STAFFING RATIOS:

Foregoing a proper assessment of patients' behavioral health service need and the subsequent establishment of behavioral health staffing ratios can have serious consequences. Organizations that have stalled at hiring minimal behavioral health providers or have no documented plan for growth have historically been unable to sustain integration for many reasons.

First, with an insufficient amount of behavioral health providers, organizations are unable to meet their patient population need. This is not only an issue for patients who lack access to care, but an issue for medical providers who are frustrated with behavioral health wait lists and full caseloads, eventually leading to them giving up on making referrals to behavioral health all together. On the other end, the behavioral health providers feel this frustration coming from their medical teams and burn out trying to meet patient need with insufficient time in their schedules. They may try to squeeze in as many patients as possible, which is unsustainable, or begin to resent the lack of support from the organization's leadership, causing to them to decide to leave the clinic in hopes of finding a less stressful job.

Second, when organizations only hire a small number of behavioral health providers it is very difficult, if not impossible, to develop the behavioral health community necessary to implement a culture shift at the organization. Instead, the one or two behavioral health providers end up largely working alone, without collegial consultation, support or comradery, which are all deeply important to the behavioral health profession. Moreover, when organizations stop or stall hiring, it sends the message to all providers and staff at the organization, whether accurate or not, that the leadership team does not value behavioral health as a core service for improving their patients' health. This message permeates throughout the organization, often in subtle or covert ways, and results in all employees being hesitant to embrace behavioral health as a fundamental service that is here to stay.

Third, when organizations stop after hiring a minimal number of behavioral health providers, all deeper integration work is stymied. Developing standardized referral protocols, multidisciplinary clinical pathways, or integrated complex care teams is simply not possible when access to behavioral health services is poor. In other words, why develop referral processes when appointments for behavioral health services are 7 weeks out?

FORMULAS FOR ESTABLISHING ACCURATE STAFFING RATIOS:

Fortunately, over the past 15 years, medical systems across the country have ironed out formulas for establishing accurate staffing ratios and the good news is that staffing ratio of behavioral health clinicians to primary care providers, or behavioral health providers to the number of patients at an organization, is fairly easy to determine. The foundation of the formula is based in research that consistently shows 70% of primary care visits are psychosocial-related and over 60% of primary care patients want and/or need behavioral health services of some kind. By doing some fairly simple math, taking into account the number of behavioral health provider FTEs (full time equivalent) and the number of patients an average behavioral health provider sees per month, organizations can begin to shape up a rough number of the behavioral health providers required to meet their patient population need. Additional individual organization characteristics and details can be then added to this basic supply-demand modeling. Organizations can do their own research on prevalence rates of behavioral health conditions in their community by using secondary data sources and extrapolating or by using their own data, if they have it. They can also examine their data to estimate the percentage of their patients who may have complex needs and require a higher number of visits over a longer period of time.

Most organizations will fall within the range of needing 1 behavioral health provider per 1000-3000 patients or 1 behavioral health provider per 1-2 primary care provider (PCPs typically have panels of about 1400 patients). This ratio can seem impossible or overwhelming at first, however, organizations should remember that this ratio does not need to be achieved over night. It is only to give them a framework and goal for moving forward in developing behavioral health as a core service line. Letting current staff know about the ratio goal can also ease the anxiety of the healthcare team. Just as a server sometimes lets a customer know that their food is running late, but is still coming, leadership can communicate their staffing ratio goals to the entire healthcare team to increase their tolerance for waiting for the ideal number of staff. If they know the organization is working towards an appropriate staffing ratio based in data, they will be more likely to express patience with the process and continue to work towards the organization's overall mission of integrated care.

Lastly, as the organization scales up their number of behavioral health providers in working towards this ratio, it is important to also remember that there is the broader hope that the organization may not actually need quite as many providers as the formula initially suggests. The ultimate goal of all integrated healthcare is to add all types of additional providers to the healthcare team, not just behavioral health providers. With more case managers, substance use disorder specialists, nutritionists, care coordinators, and community health workers as a part of the healthcare team, it is likely medical organizations will need less behavioral health providers (as well as less primary care providers) in general.

Dave Jarvis has developed an excellent tool for determining appropriate ratios. It is called the "Gap Analysis" tool and is an open source on his website, <http://www.djconsult.net/>, that anyone can use. The tool has accounted for behavioral health prevalence rates taken from California's 1115 Waiver research, the California Health Information Survey (CHIS), and nationwide MediCal data. Organizations can input their individual characteristics, such as what percentage of their patients may be getting behavioral health services outside the organization, or what the average number of sessions is for a patient utilizing behavioral health patients, in order to get an estimate of the number of behavioral health providers needed at the organization.

RECRUITMENT AND HIRING OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDERS

Recruiting the "right-fit" behavioral health providers to work in integrated settings is one of the most important factors in the success or failure of integrated behavioral health services. It is magnified even more in the early stages of integration, as each behavioral health provider that is hired becomes a representative or "billboard" for integrated behavioral health at the whole organization.

While there are basic clinical competencies and professional qualities that any employer would want in a behavioral health provider, there is a more complex skillset to look for when hiring in an integrated setting. For example, a behavioral health provider might be very well educated, trained, experienced and skillful in their field, but do poorly in an integrated setting if they do not have a high level of flexibility, a preference for collaboration and team work, excellent conflict resolution skills, and an ability to share clearly and persuasively about the importance of behavioral health in whole-person health.

These sorts of hiring mistakes are a huge cost to the organization. They cause endless stress for supervisors and leaders who have to manage performance and ultimately figure out how to deal with someone who is the wrong fit (provide them with additional training, supervision, support, or terminate their employment). When people are unsuccessful or unhappy in their jobs it also contributes to low morale, which effects the entire team and department. A wrong-fit clinician can also ultimately increase litigation risk for an organization, which can jeopardize their reputation in the community as a trusted place to come and receive care. In considering all of this, the more time spent in making sure someone is the right fit before hiring them, the better.

"Hire slow, fire fast" is a useful phrase to remember in any organizational environment, but particularly important when hiring a behavioral health provider in an integrated setting, as behavioral health providers hold the special responsibility of being a messenger for the overall importance of behavioral health at the entire clinic. Hiring slow means having a thorough hiring process with multiple panel interviews that assess for someone's strengths, abilities, experience, and potential for success in practicing in an integrated setting. Ideally, it also involves having candidates come in to shadow how work is done in the department in which they will be working before making them an offer to see their initial reactions and responses to observing work in an integrated setting. While some organizations have rigid hiring processes that limit some of these techniques, many organizations have been successful in instituting more thorough and comprehensive processes.

Normally we would expect the Human Resources department to take the lead on recruiting and selecting employees. However, in primary care organizations it is uncommon for the Human Resource Department to have any experience or expertise in recruiting quality behavioral health providers, writing accurate job descriptions, or developing appropriate interview questions. Often, the application processes in place are geared exclusively toward medical providers, leaving prospective behavioral health providers confused as to why the employer may be asking about their "hospital privileges" or why a Human Resource representative doesn't seem to understand the difference between a licensed behavioral provider and one who is acquiring hours towards licensure. Because of this, the behavioral health leaders at the organization are often the ones who drive the recruitment and hiring processes – drafting job descriptions, overseeing the onboarding protocols and performance evaluation materials. Ideally, the Human Resource department will take on more of a role in all of this as the behavioral health department grows. Until that time, the following phrases can be utilized to support in the hiring process. All encompass important qualities, skills, and expertise that are necessary to thrive in an integrated care environment and can be used in recruitment notices, job descriptions and interview questions to increase the chances of hiring "right-fit" clinicians.

EXAMPLE PHRASES FOR RECRUITMENT NOTICES:

- The ideal candidate has excellent interpersonal communication skills with clients, able to establish rapport with patients and families quickly and effectively through skilled listening and effective empathy conveyance strategies (feelings acknowledgment, reflective listening, affirmation, strength focus, effective humor).
- The ideal candidate has superior interpersonal skills with colleagues of differing disciplines and job classes, able to develop and maintain effective, genuine and supportive relationships.
- The ideal candidate has core beliefs about the primacy of healthy, goodwill relationships in the delivery of healthcare, and is motivated toward continuous learning and development in evidenced based strategies and practice to this end.
- The ideal candidate possesses at least a basic skill in de-escalation techniques, and is motivated to learn and develop broader skills in this area.
- The ideal candidate possesses a core understanding of behavior change strategies, such as Motivational Interviewing and similar philosophies and practices.
- The ideal candidate has a working knowledge of the SUD field, including the ability to conduct assessments and brief treatment.
- The ideal candidate prefers to work as a member of a team, as opposed to working solo; will find a fast pace and a somewhat unpredictable schedule energizing, as opposed to draining, and enjoys cross-discipline learning and collaboration.
- The ideal candidate is able to tolerate differences of opinion, while conveying respect and understanding for opposing views, possessing the skills to quickly resolve differences of opinion that impact team functioning and patient care.
- The ideal candidate understands the impact of all interactions on the patient experience, including phone calls, the reception and waiting room interactions, and observed/overheard interactions, and takes ownership and positive action with this in mind.
- The ideal candidate has a deep understanding of the impact of (communicated) judgment (bias) has on patients, families and colleagues, and actively works to reflect on, identify, resolve and/or manage their own judgments.
- The ideal candidate is interested in working in the leading edge of healthcare, working with a multi-disciplinary healthcare team to provide evidenced based care to patients and families.
- The ideal candidate has a high tolerance for ambiguity, for collaboratively developing new processes and practices in the development of an integrated system of care.
- The ideal candidate is interested in working in non-traditional health settings, helping to grow and develop a system of whole person care, in an egalitarian atmosphere.
- (For Model A in private medical offices) The ideal candidate is comfortable with owning their own financial risk.

- (For both Models A and B in private medical offices) The ideal candidate is comfortable with high levels of autonomy and responsibility for their own services.
- (For both Models A and B in private medical offices) The ideal candidate has experience and expertise in providing both formal and informal learning activities for colleagues.

EXAMPLE PHRASES FOR JOB DESCRIPTIONS:

- Supports the mission, vision and values of (organization X) by collaboratively developing and communicating the vision for whole person care at (organization X), as well as developing and maintaining a department that provides excellent patient-centered treatment, care, and services in an integrated, whole person, team environment.
- Enjoys working on a multi-disciplinary team, and understands the importance of shared health records and shared care plan in order to best deliver integrated care to patients.
- Consistently adheres to and/or exceeds (organization X) communication guidelines and expectations with patients and families, colleagues and supervisors.
- Models the principles and practices of evidenced based communication, including skillful listening, displaying a willingness and ability to acknowledge the needs, expectations and values of others through the use of reflective listening and empathy conveyance.
- Models and successfully communicates a vision for whole person care to patients, families and community partners.
- Models empathy and compassion for clients and their families with historically stigmatized conditions, such as chronic pain, addictive disorders, severe mental health conditions, homelessness and maladaptive behaviors such as anger problems, through the use of non-stigmatizing speech (whether communicating directly *with* patients or *about* patients), skilled empathy conveyance and professionalism in the face of difficult interactions, and promoting a spirit of understanding and compassion.
- Consistently contributes to creating and maintaining a supportive, compassionate and encouraging work atmosphere for colleagues and co-workers.
- Models and supports autonomy, self-efficacy and empowerment of co-workers and colleagues
- Skillfully engages patients and their families in their own healthcare and wellbeing, using strategies to increase their motivation and desire for improved health.
- Shares knowledge and expertise in an accessible, respectful and friendly manner with co-workers and colleagues.
- Is able to communicate through verbal interactions as well as modeling, the principles of behavioral health, including relationship-centered care and empathy as a guiding principle of all intervention.

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWING:

The following questions are what are referred to as "behaviorally based" interview questions, designed to elicit how candidates have and will respond to particular situations. Behaviorally based interview questions are considered the gold standard in the interview/selection fields.

- Share with us how you've influenced individuals, teams or workplaces in the past, to facilitate important change efforts.
- Tell us about what makes a job, or a workplace, stressful for you?
- Tell us about what makes a job, or a workplace highly rewarding and fun for you?
- What are your experiences with working as part of a team?
- Please give an example of how you have successfully navigated the complex and unspoken rules of hierarchy in healthcare, in order to develop/maintain team effective patient care.
- How would you describe your role to a patient? To their family?
- Can you talk about your understanding/experience with behavior change techniques?
- Please share a difficult piece of feedback you received, and how you responded to it (looking for insight, toleration and appreciation for feedback)
- Can you share with us a mistake you made professionally, and how you dealt with it?
- Can you share with us one of your biases or judgments, about a 'type' of patient, and how you manage it?
- If a patient said "I get treated poorly here, because I have MediCal", share with us, exactly how you might respond?
- What do you think most influences a patient's experience of a healthcare visit?
- Tell us how, in this position, you might influence patients toward improved wellbeing?
- Tell us how, in this position, you might influence other employees toward a positive work experience?

For another good resource on core competencies for all professionals in integrated behavioral health and primary care, consider reading [The SAMHSA-HRSA Center for Integrated Health Solutions \(CIHS\) 2014 report](#).

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDER PRODUCTIVITY IN INTEGRATED SETTINGS

Productivity can be a difficult subject for healthcare providers, particularly in fee-for-service settings, such as most FQHCs, because the number of patient visits completed by providers is the main source of revenue. The more patient visits completed, the more money an organization makes. Conversely, the less patient visits completed, the less money an organization makes. This puts an enormous amount of pressure on billable providers, as a group, to maintain the fiscal health of an organization. This also fosters a culture where the value of a staff member is dependent on whether they can be “bill” or not.

For most behavioral health providers, working in primary care might be the first time they've ever had productivity expectations or had their productivity closely measured. Sometimes the expectations established by management (many times medical providers) seem completely arbitrary and as if they don't understand behavioral health treatment. Other times, the productivity expectations seem totally inconsistent with ethical values of providing patients with high quality care, as behavioral health providers can be expected to see up to nine patients in an eight-hour day (in addition to completing their notes and paperwork...).

The good news is that practicing behavioral health in integrated settings is simply just different than practicing in outpatient clinics ([Typical Differences Between Behavioral Health Services in a Traditional Setting vs. a Medical Setting](#)). The productivity expectations in FQHCs are not undoable and patient care and ethics do not have to be compromised. Thanks to the many Behavioral Health Directors, behavioral health providers, and IBH administrators who have had years of trial and error in the productivity arena, we now have some general guidelines to offer.

PRINCIPLES OF PRODUCTIVITY:

1. **Avoid the binary of framing mission vs. money or clinical care vs. productivity.** One way to do this, is to consider that productivity is the same as access to care. When providers have low productivity, less people get behavioral health services, which is an access problem. When considering productivity as an access issue, most providers will agree that it is deeply important to offer as much access to behavioral health services as possible.
2. **Productivity expectations are a clinical issue.** Decisions about productivity are best made by a Behavioral Health Director, who should be a practicing behavioral health provider, instead of some other type of high level manager. While consultation with the entire leadership team and CFO should always occur, the driver of productivity decisions should be the Behavioral Health Director.
3. **Productivity is the language that primary care speaks.** Primary care providers think and speak productivity. A Behavioral Health Director will be most effective if they embrace this language and can converse confidentially about the issue, while advocating for their behavioral health providers. This is part of overall culture change on the behavioral health side.
4. **Commit to financial sustainability.** “No money no mission” is a common refrain in safety net settings. All leaders in integrated environments need to be committed to the financial health and sustainability of the organization. For Behavioral Health Directors, this need is amplified, as behavioral health services are always combatting a misconception that they are “auxiliary” services that should be grant funded because they are not self-sustaining or profitable. Behavioral health services, in all types of primary care settings, can be profitable and the Behavioral Health Director can elicit the confidence of other leaders by actively committing to making behavioral health services cost-neutral or even profitable.

5. **Use data to inform decision making.** In order to ensure behavioral health services are at least cost neutral and, ideally, profitable, organizations should regularly run financial reports. The reports should show the cost and revenue of behavioral health services, as well as the productivity of behavioral health providers. This data can be shared transparently with the entire behavioral health department.
6. **Productivity should not be incentivized alone.** There is plenty of evidence to suggest that some form of financial incentive for providers can increase productivity. There is strong evidence that having a percentage of salaries, partly at risk (usually 20-30% of salary depends on productivity). However, incentivizing productivity must be done delicately, as it can inappropriately contribute to the culture of quantity over quality and of rewarding busyness over impact (not to mention the fact that the fee-for-service world we live in already reinforces this). Some organizations have been successful in incentivizing productivity by also having a percentage of the incentive related to quality of care measures and a percentage related to other organizational goals, such as team care.

SPECIFICS:

1. Most primary care organizations with integrated behavioral health services have set productivity expectations that range between 6-9 patients a day. As mentioned above, less than 6 can become an ethical access-to-care issue, as it indicates that the behavioral health providers may not be being utilized effectively at the organization to provide clinical services to patients. If providers feel overwhelmed by seeing 6 or more patients a day, it is important to explore with them what may be getting in the way of their productivity. Do they fully understand the clinical differences in practicing in integrated settings? How long are their sessions/visits? What are they doing with their time that may be better done by existing administrative support staff. Seeing more than 9 patients a day is possible for some clinicians, for a short period of time, however, more than 9 patients a day for weeks, months, or years on end replicates some of the most troubling aspects of primary care - a pace that does not allow for deep presence with patients, a schedule that does not accommodate needed breaks or other self-care, little allotted time to complete charting during the work day, and the like, which all contribute to high levels of provider burn-out.
2. Having a range is important. Provider temperament, preferences, and clinical practice styles vary between all types of providers, including behavioral health providers. Some providers will be most comfortable staying on the low end of the productivity range while some will thrive at the high end. Generally speaking the more autonomy providers can have in determining their own pace, the better (within the organization's determined range). The more autonomy an organization provides to employees, the more employees will be apt to affirm autonomy with patients, which is related to engagement and activation.
3. Scheduling templates matter. There is variation in the IBH field on the length of sessions. Some organizations have 30 minute sessions, some have 45, and some still have the traditional 50-60 minute sessions. In fact, most allow for a mix of all of these. It is important to remember that this will impact the productivity range of clinicians and that the goal of productivity is to be sitting in front of patients, providing services, for approximately 75% of the day.
4. No shows should not impact productivity. Unlike medical providers, behavioral health providers always have patients in the clinic that can benefit from behavioral health intervention, whether they walk in to see a behavioral health provider or not. In a clinic with 3 medical providers and 1 behavioral health provider, on average, 75 patients will come through the clinic that day, for a medical appointment. During any given hour, there will be approximately 10 patients in the clinic, either in the waiting room or

in the exam rooms. Part of working in an integrated system is seeing patients in non-traditional ways, including asking reception who they think might need behavioral health services (they often have patients self-disclose difficulties when checking in or they might observe a new mom struggling with comforting her baby). When a behavioral health provider has a no show, they can ask the medical team who is in the clinic right now that might need behavioral health support. They may also go into provider exam rooms to check in, introduce themselves, and ask patients if a patient has any behavioral health related concerns (Warm Hand-offs, Cool Hand-offs, and Step-ins: Philosophy, Procedures, and Related Communication). With 70% of medical visits having a psycho-social component, 7 of the 10 patients in the clinic at any given time could use the behavioral provider's services.

DOCUMENTATION AND BILLING

INTEGRATED DOCUMENTATION:

In integrated settings, all documentation for all behavioral health services, including substance use disorders, should be included within one shared electronic health record. This means no firewalls, “confidential” tab or other markers separating medical team documentation and behavioral health documentation. This ensures that certain information is not “more protected” than others and allows for greater collaboration in care. Ideally, within the EHR there is also a shared care plan, showing all treatment goals for the patient, including behavioral health goals, physical health goals, and any social-environmental goals.

Most clinicians have been well trained in documentation, typically learning to use it as a part of the “Data, Assessment, Plan” or “Subjective, Objective, Assessment, Plan” format. Quality documentation is important in any given setting for multiple reasons:

1. **For the patient** - If and when they need it in order to support applications for benefits, such as SSDI or supportive housing, or if and when they need it as evidence for mandated treatment, such as with cases involving child protective services or the judicial system.
2. **For the treating clinician** - To assist them in remembering relevant disclosures and diagnostic formulations between visits. Additionally, for some clinicians, the process of writing and making decisions about the language and the wording of the documentation assists them in formulating clinical impressions and thoughts about treatment.
3. **For the treatment team** - To assist the team, especially the primary care provider, in communicating about treatment goals in order to facilitate safe and high quality care.
4. **For the payer** - To justify services and reimbursement.

Beyond this, there are some important differences in how documentation is approached in traditional behavioral health settings and how it is approached in integrated behavioral health settings:

Less time is spent on documentation, in general. In integrated settings, the vast majority of a clinician's time is spent on patients, not documentation. Generally speaking, 5-10 minutes is spent on documentation for each patient seen.

Documentation is focused where the patient is focused. In integrated settings, clinicians document where the patient is at and what their presenting difficulties and goals are. Their bio-psycho-social history is only important in as much as it helps the patient therapeutically or helps the clinician in understanding the patient's wants and needs. This means documentation requirement does not set the agenda for the visit. Instead, the patient's needs and preferences in regards to what they want to talk about and work on drives the session- documentation follows. This may seem commonsensical, however, in most traditional behavioral health settings, the need to document the use of certain interventions or the standardized assessments typically drives the session's content.

Documentation supports measurement based care. This means that the clinician and the patient are clear on both what the goal of therapy is and how progress is going to be measured. Another term used for this is “treat to target”- if the patient's goals are the cessation of panic attacks, improved relations with their children, and relief from resentment toward their ex-husband, both the clinician and the patients should know how progress will be measured- in other words, how will the patient

and clinician know if therapy is effective? One way to ensure documentation supports this, is to identify the patient's goals for treatment in the documentation. Follow up notes should indicate if the patient's smaller objectives were adhered to and what the outcome was, such as whether the behavior improved, worsened, or experienced no change. With this, any changes in the treatment plan, goals, or recommendations are noted in the follow up notes.

Documentation is more general when it comes to trauma and other sensitive subjects. Shared electronic health records are a cornerstone of operational and clinical integration. When records are separated, either geographically or with confidential tabs or electronic firewalls, it is a barrier to collaborative whole-person care, both practically and philosophically. However, because records are shared, behavioral health documentation in integrated settings is typically more general, brief and treatment focused than documentation in traditional behavioral health settings. As an example: "childhood trauma is endorsed; sexual abuse by grandfather" is a sufficient note to put in the EHR, as opposed to a paragraph detailing the abuse's frequency or severity. Care should also be taken in documenting subjects such as infidelity, sexual conditions or concerns, immigration status and criminal behavior. Documentation should only consist of that which is medically necessary for the health team to know and what is relevant to support treatment planning.

Radial buttons are utilized more. This is because Integrated Behavioral Health focuses both on individual treatment and population based care. As the IT and QI people always tell us, only radial buttons can be made into a report! Not only is it quicker to use radial buttons to document a patient's functional impairments, risk factors, and even the interventions being used, it can also help with gathering potentially useful population or other quality data. In documenting a patient's information, radial buttons should be used in conjunction with articulate, well-crafted, sentences to convey important clinical information and impressions. Using them in combination with short narratives can make documentation even quicker and more effective.

STIGMA AND DOCUMENTATION:

A robust body of research shows that the use of stigmatizing wording and terms to describe patients and/or their actions, directly leads to worse health outcomes. More specifically, research has shown that patients who were described with stigmatizing words by treating providers in documentation received worse treatment than those who's documentation did not include stigmatizing terminology. The majority of research around the connection between stigma and documentation has been done in the substance use disorder field. As a result of the initial research findings, the SUD field took a strong stance, with many large governmental and research institutions releasing position papers on how to avoid the use of particular words and phrases commonly found in documentation to describe those who have substance use disorders. Due in part to standard social work education, behavioral health leaders and providers often have a deepest understanding of the negative effects of stigma on patients, as well as the healing power of the opposite of stigma - empathy. For this reason, in integrated settings, behavioral health staff are often the trailblazers in decreasing practices within the healthcare system that maintain or contribute to stigma.

One of the most powerful ways stigma is developed and maintained in the healthcare setting is through words, in both written and verbal formats. Charting documentation is particularly influential because it is read by the entire health team and is part of the patient's permanent healthcare record. Behavioral health leaders and clinicians can role model de-stigmatizing documentation practices for the health team through their own documentation. They can also role model de-stigmatizing language in co-worker to co-worker verbal communications and treatment team meetings. They set the tone in how patients are talked about and can contribute to the overall culture shift in how patients with previously stigmatized disorders are viewed by the

healthcare team and society more generally.

In the chart below are some examples of stigmatizing words and phrases that are in commonly used in the health settings and some suggestions on how to replace them.

Stigmatizing word or phrase	Why it is problematic	Alternative
Patient is 'Non-compliant'	This phrase typically denotes insubordination or resistance; it does not distinguish whether someone is not doing something because they are not able, do not agree, or can't afford it, etc.	'Patient reports not starting medications because...'
Substance 'abuse' or substance 'abuser'	Any version of the word 'abuse' when referring to those with SUD, has been shown to relate to worse care received and worse outcomes.	'Patient has an addictive disorder' or 'patient has a substance use disorder'
Manipulative	This word is judgment laden; all people try to get what they need in particular ways	No replacement; avoid
Lying	Although most people do not share everything accurately with their health team, this word is often only used with those who have SUD. Honest self-disclosures are related to the level of trust and care a healthcare team has with a patient; if a patient isn't telling the truth about something, the healthcare provider/team may want to look at the judgment they may be conveying that inhibits honest communication	'UA is positive for amphetamines; Patient states they have not used any substances'
Schizophrenic, diabetic, addict	This is the opposite of 'person first' language.	'Patient has diabetes' 'Person with schizophrenia' 'Person with an addictive disorder'
Narcotic	This word is a legal term, not a clinical one, indicating a judgement about legality	Opioid, amphetamine, cocaine, etc.
Dirty UA	Typically, only used to refer to a person's urine analysis that is positive for alcohol or other drugs. UA's that show pregnancy, or UTIs, are typically not referred to as 'dirty'	'Patient's UA was positive for cocaine'.
Drug Seeking	Drug seeking is not a clinical term, and is used almost exclusively as a pejorative. It obfuscates potentially important diagnostic information. It does not indicate whether someone is seeking medication because their pain is under-treated, because they may have an addictive disorder, or for other reasons. Most often used to describe a demanding attitude, as opposed to a diagnostic symptom.	'Patient requesting refills before due'; 'patient discloses using medication more frequently than prescribed'; 'patient appeared angry/upset/scared when informed no refill was possible'

BILLING:

Electronic Health Record Template: For better or for worse, today, documentation is driven primarily by EHR templates. Many of these templates have been created with payer sources in mind and are a non-negotiable “must” for billing purposes. Undoubtedly, they can be helpful for everyone because they streamline documentation and billing. However, when EHR templates are developed, behavioral health experts are rarely involved in the process to provide their input and expertise. For this reason, many behavioral health templates often include what seems like irrelevant sections or appear disorganized - like they were created as an afterthought. They tend to fall short of properly being able to capture a client’s conditions or experiences and are usually pathology focused as opposed to strengths focused.

If an organization has a Behavioral Health Director, they can take charge in working with the electronic health record to update the templates to be more tailored to behavioral health. They may even choose to engage their whole behavioral health team in brainstorming what they may want to remove and add to the template to ensure all of the providers at the organization can voice their opinion about what they feel is important to include. Still, many times behavioral health providers need to find a way to document appropriate and relevant clinical impressions within existing templates, while still attending to the needs of the payer source.

Avoiding billing-driven documentation and treatment: While, in the end, most documentation will meet the needs of both the clinician and the payer, it is of the utmost importance for clinicians to understand the difference between documentation that is good clinical practice and documentation that must be included for reimbursement (when these two are different). As stated above, integrated documentation is typically more general and brief than documentation in traditional outpatient behavioral health clinic settings. However, just as providers should avoid overly detailed documentation about sensitive topics, providers should also guard against the loss of quality clinical documentation by focusing solely on meeting the payer’s needs. They should also avoid the temptation to become absorbed by what information must be obtained for a given payer, grant, or EHR template when meeting with a patient. An unfortunate and common pitfall of clinicians is to stress themselves to find out someone’s veteran status, sexual orientation, or history of incarceration instead of focusing on establishing rapport, developing a sufficient therapeutic alliance, or finding out what the patient would like help with. This can inadvertently lead to passivity and distrust in patients, as they may feel that the clinician is more interested in “checking boxes” than actively listening to their specific needs and preferences. This sort of clinical damage can be hard to make up as treatment progresses and can lead to the patient not wanting to come back for behavioral health services at all.

In integrated settings, the key is for clinicians to remain conscious and clear about effective clinical practices in developing relationships with patients, while also completing notes in the EHR. To do this, clinicians may need to wait to complete their charting until after a session is over so that they can be fully present, open, and engaged in their face-to-face time with patients. The vast majority of the time, by simply using open ended questions and bringing a genuine sense of curiosity to the conversation, clinicians will obtain and elicit all of the information they require to mutually meet both the system’s and the patient’s needs.

In integrated settings, billing is done within the EHR system. The following codes are the most commonly billed services and are in the Next Gen system already:

Psychiatric/Psychological Interview: 90791

Individual Psychotherapy, 30 min: 90832

Individual Psychotherapy, 45 min: 90834

Individual Psychotherapy, 60 min: 90837

Family Psychotherapy (patient present): 90847

Group Psychotherapy: 90853

However, there are services and diagnoses that are not billable by the major payers (Managed Care MediCal Health plans and their behavioral health administrators). Some examples are:

- V codes
- Primary diagnosis of substance abuse (carved out to the County- except for SBIRT services and MAT)
- Services for the SMI population (carved out to the County)

In other cases, some services are often partially paid. Some common examples are:

- Behavioral health visits on the same day as a primary care. At FQHCs, these visits cannot both be billed for at a PPS fee. However, most MediCal health plans (or their behavioral health vendor) reimburse same day visits at their fee for service rates. FQHC's will want to further explore the ramifications of this (possible reconciliation) before taking action.
- Services by unlicensed MFTs and ASWs. These are often reimbursed by MediCal health plans or their behavioral health vendors (in the \$40-50-dollar range)

These are just examples and are not meant to be a strict billing guideline for organizations, as there are always differences between health plans and other funding streams. In addition, organizations also frequently have multiple payers (MediCare and private insurance), different revenue streams (PPS rates vs. fee for service rates), and different funding sources (such as grants and contracts). This means that most integrated systems do not base their service structure and clinical decisions solely on what is billable and what is not. Instead, services are based on the organizations mission, ethical guidelines, and patient care needs. For example, although V codes and a primary diagnosis of substance abuse are not covered by most insurances, it is rare that an organization would not allow clinicians to see or treat patients for these conditions, particularly if the patient has indicated a clear preference for treatment at the organization as opposed to an outside provider. Clinicians should also avoid "finding" a diagnosis when a patient does not meet criteria for one solely to be able to bill for services. Many organizations include a percentage of unbillable services into the financial modeling for behavioral health services (just as with medical services) so that providers can see or treat patients who may not present with behavioral health concerns that fall perfectly into billing categories. However, since billing is tied to documentation in most EHR systems, it is important for behavioral health providers to have clarity about their organization's billing practices and policies, including their protocols for providing services when they are not billable, when treating patients.

PATIENT PAPERWORK GUIDELINES FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDERS

PRINCIPLES:

- Patient paperwork that is health related (in the broadest definition) is considered to be a part of a patient's care.
- Guidelines for paperwork completion should be standardized throughout the organization to ensure that all providers (medical, behavioral, dental, etc.) follow the same protocols and that the patient experience is consistent.
- Patient paperwork should be a part of a patient's healthcare record.
- Providers should only be responsible for filling out the clinical parts of paperwork. Any "non-clinical" parts should be filled out by other staff. Behavioral health providers often find this to be difficult. While medical providers typically have a "team" of people to handle non-clinical issues, behavioral health staff usually runs with very little administrative support. Initiatives such as "integration", "collaborative care", and "SBIRT" do offer some opportunities to fund support staff for behavioral health providers. Behavioral health providers should advocate for this kind of support and educate their workplace about how it will free up time so that they can be more productive clinicians.

PROTOCOLS:

- Behavioral health clinicians should fill out paperwork that is related to a patient's mental health condition or its symptoms, such as State Disability, SSDI, testing accommodations, or letters for independent study for school, since it is within their area of expertise.
- If a behavioral health clinician receives a request for paperwork to be filled out from a patient, primary care provider, or elsewhere in the system, and they have not seen the patient for a recent assessment, it is prudent to have the patient called in for a new assessment appointment before the paperwork can be completed.
- If a patient does not meet the criteria for the benefit that they are hoping for (for example, if a patient does not meet the criteria for depression that impairs their functioning enough to warrant State disability), it is important to let them know that, although the paperwork will be filled out, it may not meet their expectations or hopes. This allows the clinician to elicit any feelings or reactions the patient may have and repair any wounding that it may cause to the therapeutic relationship.
- Paperwork brought in during a visit can be filled out during the visit. It is a good idea to ask for the patient's permission to complete the paperwork during session, or in the last half of the visit, but this usually does not cause an issue as it not only meets their request to have it completed in a timely manner. It also allows for real-time assessment and documenting. The clinicians should copy the paperwork and scan it into the patient's health record.
- If paperwork is particularly long or laborious, a behavioral health clinician may choose to complete it during time outside of the visit or let the patient know it may take 2-3 visits to get the paperwork done properly.
- When letters are requested from patients as "proof" or "evidence", it can be particularly difficult for providers. For example, a patient may ask for a letter stating that their ex-spouse is causing their

daughter's anxiety or that their spouse's deportation would cause significant harm to their children. While, generally speaking, it is best to fulfill the patient's request for a letter, it is important to inform the patient that their diagnosis, treatment regimens, or other factual information might be recorded in the letter. The letter should avoid direct recommendations outside the scope of services, guessing, or conjecture. It should only include factual documentation about a patient's care at the organization. Although this sort of information is not always helpful to the patient's cause, it is important that clinicians stay within their purview. In a way, it also "frees" the clinician from having to make a difficult decision about either saying "no" to the patient's request and thereby wounding the therapeutic relationship or saying "yes" to the patient and making an inappropriate recommendation in the particular situation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In the early years of the integrated behavioral health field, confidentiality was a difficult issue for many organizations and for behavioral health clinicians specifically, as they had been trained in a very strict culture of confidentiality. As time went on and many organizations began to integrate substance abuse treatment and primary care, it became even more complicated due to the differing privacy laws around substance use treatment. In many ways, today, these concerns have not changed. It can still be difficult to distinguish between legal mandates, ethical guidelines, and common discipline specific norms and practices, while also considering one's own personal belief systems. This document is not intended to provide legal guidance to practitioners, but rather to help them explore the different confidentiality related issues that often come up in integrated settings. In general, it is important to consult with your specific supervisor or obtain guidance from your organization's legal counsel when faced with more complex decisions about confidentiality and privacy.

LEGAL ISSUES:

HIPPA: All patient information is protected by HIPAA and HIPAA does not make distinctions between the different medical disciplines. Even though HIPAA requires healthcare providers to protect patient privacy, providers are permitted, in most circumstances, to communicate with the patient's family, friends, or others involved in their care or payment for care. This can seem to go against the culture of the behavioral health field, as clinicians are used to having patients sign releases of information (ROIs) in order to speak to family members or others involved in their care. Further, many clinicians who are newer to working in a primary care setting are shocked when they see a patient's information given out to pharmacies and specialists without first securing a signed ROI from the patient. Although this type of exchange of information and communication is allowed in integrated settings, providers should still only share that information which is necessary for medical treatment.

It is also important to remember that there are no legal barriers to integrating the behavioral health clinician's notes into the larger Electronic Health Record. Although HIPAA does say that "psychotherapy notes" must have specific protections, the law's definition of these sorts of "psychotherapy notes" is "notes that are written for the 'benefit of the provider'". More broadly speaking this means that "personal notes" are those that do not have information about a patient's diagnosis, functional status, symptoms, or treatment interventions. They might, however, include information about a therapist's own counter transference, for example. For the therapist's own benefit, these notes would be kept separate from the patient's actual record. Here is the quote from HIPAA regarding "psychotherapy notes":

"Psychotherapy notes exclude medication prescription and monitoring, counseling session start and stop times, the modalities and frequencies of treatment furnished, results of clinical tests, and any summary of the following items: diagnosis, functional status, the treatment plan, symptoms, prognosis, and progress to date".

42-CFR- PART 2: 42 CFR Part 2 is the federal government's regulations concerning the confidentiality of drug and alcohol abuse treatment and prevention records. 42-CFR is somewhat stricter than HIPPA, although most differences are not legal, but rather related to different practice norms between disciplines. Here is a summary of the few legal differences:

1. HIPPA allows disclosures of patient information to public health entities about communicable disease. 42-CFR does not allow this without a written patient consent form (a release of

- records). Substance abuse providers (those providing substance abuse treatment) must adhere to 42-CFR.
2. HIPPA mandates a provider to report when a patient makes a disclosure of domestic violence and there is an injury present at the time of the visit. 42-CFR does not allow this without a signed release form. Substance abuse providers must adhere to 42-CFR. This is one of the few differences between mental health providers and medical providers.
 3. HIPPA allows patients to access their records. 42- CFR leaves it to the provider's discretion. All substance abuse providers must adhere to HIPPA on this one.
 4. HIPPA allows patient information to be disclosed for payment. 42-CFR does not allow this without a signed release form. Substance abuse providers must follow 42-CFR.
 5. HIPPA allows providers to disclose information pertinent to a patient's treatment to other organizations and healthcare providers (this is why doctors can call pharmacies about patients). 42-CFR doesn't allow this without a signed release form. Substance abuse providers must follow 42 CFR. Generally speaking, mental health providers adhere to 42-CFR on this one as well and opt to get a signed release form before talking to other providers.
 6. HIPPA allows a patient representative (power of attorney, parent of adolescent, ect) to sign releases. 42-CFR does not.
 7. HIPPA does not state that a Prohibition of Re-Disclosure of Information statement must accompany records that are released. 42-CFR does.

Mandated Reporting: Mandated reporting laws apply to both medical and behavioral health providers and are generally the same for both professional fields, but there is one significant legal difference between the two professions' standards. Medical providers are mandated to report suspected or disclosed domestic violence when the patient has a current injury from the violence and is being treated by the provider. Behavioral health providers are NOT mandated to report domestic violence, even when there is visible injury or the patient is being treated for the injury by a medical provider in the same setting. In these situations, the medical provider would be mandated to report, but not the behavioral health provider. In most integrated organizations, this difference is articulated to patients in a written document such as a Consent to Treat form or other informational material about behavioral health services. This difference in reporting requirements is important to note, but does not usually cause any significant difficulties between employees or patients in integrated settings.

Ethical Issues: Most integrated care organizations create release of information and consent forms in addition to establishing policies and practices that adhere to the most restrictive laws (42-CFR). Releases of information forms typically have clearly delineated lines for the release of 1) Medical records 2) Behavioral health records and 3) Substance abuse records. This enables patients to make informed decisions about what communication and information exchange they would like to consent to.

Behavioral health providers who feel strongly about obtaining ROI's before speaking to family members or care providers at other organizations can continue to do so. There is rarely a downside or a difficulty with obtaining ROI's from patients – if anything, it conveys a level of care and concern for their personal preferences about how and what information is shared with others. Moreover, it may help the patient better understand what it means to be treated in an integrated setting. If they have not been treated in integrated settings before, they may not realize that their notes and diagnosis are being shared in the Electronic Health Record. Some

organizations have developed formal ways of communicating how a patient's information will be shared with consent to treat forms but many behavioral health providers still like to inform patients of this verbally during the first session. When doing so, the provider should frame the information in a way that lets the patient know that the organization believes shared records help a treatment team to give the best care possible. With this, it can also be helpful to let patients know that their notes will be very general and only include information that is necessary for treatment. Even more, a clinician may give the patient the option to have their notes read back to them after the session to ensure they are comfortable with what is being written. Often, this builds trust in the therapeutic relationship and helps patients get a sense of what the documentation is like. If a patient takes issue with any important clinical information that is being written and it becomes difficult to agree on what should be included in the EHR through a quick discussion, it is a good idea to articulate that integrated setting (where notes are shared) might not be the best place for them to obtain services. From there, the patient can decide where they would like to receive care.

For more information on confidentiality, SAMHSA has a [review of HIPPA and 42-CFR](#) and their applications for practice setting. Another helpful like is to [SAMHSA's beta site](#), which has clarifying FAQ for all sorts of laws and regulations.

PRIVATE MEDICAL PRACTICES

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INTEGRATION IN PRIVATE MEDICAL ORGANIZATIONS AND PRACTICES

75% of all federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) in California have behavioral health services onsite, with some level of integration with medical care services. With an overwhelming amount of supporting research and writings, foundation-driven initiatives, and large grants from nationwide organizations like SAMHSA and HRSA, it is tempting to think that behavioral health services have been integrated into all primary care settings, at some level. However, outside of FQHCs, integration continues to be limited. Private primary care offices, group medical practices, urgent care clinics, Planned Parenthoods, OBGYN offices and other private medical practices rarely have onsite behavioral health services. Many don't even have a protocol for referring patients to behavioral health services or engage in relationships with mental health or substance use providers in the community.

For this reason, a fairly large gap has developed between the "one-stop-shop" model that FQHCs have to offer in terms of being able to provide whole-person healthcare in an integrated fashion and the "single-service-line" model dominant in private practice offices. This is certainly not the fault of private medical practice providers and owners. While integration may not have been easy at FQHCs, it certainly was, and continues to be, financially feasible, sustainable, and often profitable. FQHCs typically bill at a PPS rate for behavioral health, which can be hundreds of dollars a visit. For FQHCs, the challenge of integrating behavioral health has traditionally been more about culture change and infrastructure than about the actual financial feasibility.

Private offices couldn't be more different. In a fee for service or capitated environment, primary care providers who see MediCal patients are minimally reimbursed (with California being at the very bottom of the list for MediCal reimbursement rates in the country. Capitated contracts often pay as little as \$11 dollars a month per patient). Behavioral health providers, who are not generally capitated, can make as little as \$40 dollars a visit, making the startup of integrated behavioral health appear cost-prohibitive and unsustainable.

The silver lining is that integration of behavioral health services in private medical settings is possible and has been done successfully. Moreover, private practices have reaped all the benefits that we already know come from IBH services, including increased job satisfaction for medical providers and their teams, which comes from multidisciplinary comradery and the satisfaction of knowing patients are getting the care they need. They are also seeing the improved patient care outcomes that occur when behavioral health conditions are treated jointly with physical health conditions. While this part of field is still in its infancy (after all, the community health center IBH field is only really in its adolescence), we already have several key learnings from those who have implemented IBH successfully in the private setting.

MODELS TO INTEGRATE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH IN PRIVATE MEDICAL PRACTICES:

Model A - Behavioral Health Provider as a Contractor: In this model, the medical practice recruits a licensed behavioral health provider to work as a contractor for the practice. For the provider, some aspects of this model resemble a private practice - the behavioral health provider has control over their schedule, can decide to work part time or full time, and has full responsibility and risk for their income, which is based on the number of patients they see. The behavioral health provider pays the practice owner(s) rent, their portion of the EHR cost, a percentage of their reimbursement for billing services, and a fee for scheduling and other front office

support (reminder calls, rescheduling, faxing, etc.). This is often rolled into one monthly overhead payment. In this model, behavioral health providers agree to see only patients of the medical practice, to protect the time necessary to enhance the health of the practice's patient population. Decisions about who pays for office furniture in the behavioral health provider's office, how much support the front and back office provide, interpretation services, etc., are all points of negotiation, and are best documented in a contract of some sort.

Model A benefits for practice owners: Low risk for the practice owners, as the behavioral health therapist is responsible for their own income. This is a partnership relationship instead of a boss-staff relationship.

Model A benefits for the behavioral health provider: High levels of autonomy and freedom in their own practice decisions, including their own levels of productivity. They also benefit from having a full practice, without any marketing. As 70% of all primary care visits are psychosocially driven, one medical provider in the practice can likely fill a panel for one behavioral health therapist.

Model B - Behavioral Health Provider as Employee: In this model, the private medical practices hire the licensed behavioral health provider as an employee. In order to ensure financial sustainability, the practice owners determine the level of productivity necessary for the behavioral health provider, using an average of the fee for service rates they would receive from the practice's most common payers.

Benefits for the practice owners: Practice owners have more control over the behavioral health provider's schedule and productivity expectations. Also, any profit generated by patient visits over the behavioral health provider's salary are kept by the practice owners.

Benefits for the behavioral health provider: Almost no financial risk. They also receive all benefits offered as an employee at the practice.

SIMILARITIES IN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INTEGRATION IN BOTH FQHCs AND PRIVATE MEDICAL SETTINGS:

1. For both FQHCs and private medical practices, recruiting the right-fit behavioral health provider is one of the most important drivers of successful integration. [Recruitment and Hiring of Behavioral Health Providers](#) has more detailed information on the personal and professional qualities that make a skilled integrated behavioral health provider.
2. For both FQHCs and private medical practices, operational integration must occur. This means that the behavioral health provider charts within the same EHR as the medical practice, integrated consent to treat and release of PHI forms are in place, and that behavioral health provider offices are nestled within, or as close as possible to, the medical care offices. See the [Operational Integration](#) section for more detailed information.
3. In both FQHCs and private medical practices, behavioral health services are integrated into the medical practice's website, advertising, marketing, and other patient materials.
4. In both FQHCs and private medical practices, effective formal and informal communication strategies must exist between behavioral health providers and medical providers for successful integration.
5. In both FQHCs and private medical practices, behavioral health providers become mandatory attendees at all staff and provider meetings.
6. In both FQHCs and private medical practices, behavioral health providers only see patients receiving their medical care at the organization, not outside consumers.

KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INTEGRATION IN FQHCs AND PRIVATE MEDICAL SETTINGS:

1. Behavioral health providers can only bill a fee for service rate to insurance companies, making financial sustainability in private medical settings more complex than in FQHCs.

Strategic solution: It is possible for behavioral health services to be profitable for the medical practice when the behavioral health provider is an employee of the practice or a contractor. Behavioral Health providers who see between 6 and 8 billable visits a day, at a MediCal reimbursement rate, will generate \$113,000 - \$148,000 a year. A breakdown of the process to calculate this is below:

- Obtain reimbursement codes from all major payers (an example from Beacon is located in the [appendix](#)).
- Determine the number of first visits and follow ups necessary to meet the desired financial goal (a good rule of thumb to ensure access is 25% of visits each month should be new patient visits).
- Remember in calculating, that no-shows are *not a barrier* to meeting necessary productivity numbers on a daily or weekly basis, as behavioral health providers can work with medical providers to get real-time, same day, referrals when they have a no-show opening in their schedule. With 70% of patients having a need for behavioral health services, there will always be multiple patients in the building that can benefit from intervention. See [Warm Hand-offs, Cool Hand-offs and Step-Ins: Philosophy, Procedures, and Related Communication](#) for more information.

For Model A: deduct the monthly overhead of the behavioral health provider to obtain gross income. Then, calculate the self-employment tax burden to get the net income.

For Model B: deduct the behavioral health provider's salary and other costs to obtain net profit.

2. In private medical offices, there is typically no existing infrastructure or institutional knowledge to credential and contract with payers in order to bill for behavioral health services.

Strategic solution: Behavioral health provider credentialing and contracting with insurance companies is simpler than medical provider credentialing, contracting, although both can take as little as 30 days, or as much as 180 days. There are many companies that do this work for a reasonable fee as well, so the practice owners and the behavioral health provider (hired or contracted) usually decide together if the existing medical practice's office manager and support staff are able to support the credentialing and contracting processes for the behavioral health provider, or if hiring an outside agency to provide this services is more efficient.

Because behavioral health billing is simpler than medical billing there are also much fewer denials. All EHRs have billing built into their system, so as long as the behavioral health provider is using billable CPT and ICD-10 codes, the billing staff at the practice will typically find billing for behavioral health fairly easy. It is important to note that in both model A and B, the behavioral health provider will not begin to generate revenue until they are successfully contracted and credentialed with insurance companies, so this process should be started as soon as possible. It is also important to note that a contracted behavioral health provider using Model A may decide to use a company outside of the medical practice to do their billing for a percentage of the billed service. This is not recommended,

as it lessens operational integration, however there may be times that it is preferable for the behavioral health provider or the medical practice.

3. In private medical offices, there is rarely a Chief Medical Officer, let alone a Behavioral Health Director or Supervisor.

Strategic solution: When private offices decide to integrate behavioral health, they typically hire one provider, initially, and may add a few more as they increase their understanding and comfort level with the associated behavioral health processes, costs and revenue. This behavioral health leader isn't tasked with developing the entire program or department, however they usually are responsible for formal and informal training for medical providers and their teams on the most salient issues around behavioral health – including addressing stigma of historically marginalized populations and conditions, modeling the importance of empathic relationship-centered care, and explaining the importance of multidisciplinary clinical pathways such as universal screenings and referral processes. They, more generally, providing expertise, leadership and vision around all things behavioral health in the practice.

The fact that there is no behavioral health supervisor also means that the behavioral health provider(s), will likely be responsible to find their own clinical consultation or supervision, as if they were in a private practice. As this is deeply important for clinical skill and continued professional growth (Clinical Supervision). This is not difficult to find. The behavioral health provider may opt to pay for supervision themselves, or may join a clinical consultation group in their community. Once there is more than one behavioral health provider at the organization, it is recommended that the behavioral health providers meet regularly to provide clinical consultation and feedback for each other.

SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT

PRINCIPLES OF SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT

Principles of Screening: The definition of screening is to examine a large group of usually asymptomatic, or not known to be symptomatic, individuals in order to detect those with a high probability of having or developing a particular condition. Screening in integrated settings typically involves giving all patients a set of questions at a designated frequency. For example, giving the PHQ-2 or PHQ-9 (depression screening) to all patients 17 and over twice a year or giving the Pediatric Symptom Checklist (screening for emotional and behavioral difficulties) to all children between the ages of 4-16 once a year. While organizations will differ in their screening content or frequency, screenings are ideally evidenced-based, such as the US Preventative Task Force's recommendations on screenings for Nicotine use, alcohol use, and depression symptoms, among others. In integrated settings, screenings are not typically done by behavioral health providers since the number of patients who receive behavioral health services is usually only a small subset of all the patients coming into a clinic. For this reason, screenings are typically done at the reception area or in an exam room with a Medical Assistant, where theoretically 100% of patients will receive it.

Principles of Assessment: Behavioral health providers have been educated, trained, and supervised on assessments extensively. However, the guiding principles of assessment in integrated behavioral health settings are different from those in traditional mental health settings. Traditional mental health settings typically separate assessment from treatment, using the first contact with patients to complete a formal assessment questionnaire before embarking on therapy. However, the drawbacks to this model are significant. Separating assessment from treatment has been shown to lead to higher dropout rates. It is not hard to understand why: when someone works up enough courage to come to a behavioral health appointment, if the first visit is a list of yes or no questions, and at the end, the patient does not 'get' anything, they will often not return (some research indicates a 70% drop out rate after the first visit, when the first visit is only assessment). Traditional assessment protocols don't allow for the therapist to "follow" the patient. Instead, they demand the therapist to "follow" a structure where they have to ask closed-ended questions that make the patient the passive recipient of a string of typically pathological and problem-focused inquiries. Moreover, research shows (and clinicians agree) that spending an hour having a patient answer these closed-end questions or only those questions that the organization decides are important, results in an insufficient amount of attention being paid to establishing goodwill, trust, and other aspects of the therapeutic alliance. All of this leads to lower return rates for a second visit to "start" treatment.

Additionally, out of all patients that seek behavioral health services, the most common number of sessions they complete is one. It is useful to remember this stark fact- that the first visit might be the only chance for the clinician to provide treatment. There is an entire behavioral health model built on this fact, called 'Single Session Therapy', and the research on it has demonstrated conclusively that when a single session is approached purposefully, as the only session, and skillfully, patients are helped a great deal.

For all of these reasons, integrated behavioral health practices usually engage in assessments differently. Assessments are not separated from treatment, meaning that assessment and treatment occur concurrently, from the first visit. Assessments usually begin with the clinician eliciting what the patient is most concerned about. In the case that the patient does not disclose any concerns, the assessment might begin with the behavioral health provider introducing something that a primary care provider was concerned about (such as the reason for the referral) or something that has been endorsed on a screening tool. For example, if the patient was referred to behavioral health services because they are diabetic and have an HBAIC over 9 and

all diabetics with an HBAIC over 9 are referred to behavioral health services, but the patient doesn't disclose this as a concern, the behavioral health provider should still consider the reason for the referral as the beginning point of the assessment. However, the vast majority of the time, the patient will disclose a concern and express what they most wish to discuss. In this context, the next step is for the behavioral health provider to use their clinical judgment and communication skills to elicit more relevant and fruitful information about the patient. For example, a therapist may say "tell me more about your diabetes". In integrated settings it is expected that the therapist will not obtain all of the patient's biopsychosocial information in the first visit. Instead, equal attention is paid to what the patient most wants to address and building the therapeutic alliance. The therapist does, however, usually elicit enough information in the first visit to make a provisional diagnosis. This is considered to be sufficient for meeting clinical and operational needs.

Integrated behavioral health settings use this assessment method because patients are more likely to return for their next appointment when they feel that the therapist has paid attention to them in a genuine way instead of firing off questions. Moreover, this method allows for the assessment to be based on self-disclosure. Self-disclosure, in turn, produces a higher quality assessment and strengthens the therapeutic alliance that will be so critically important throughout the rest of the therapeutic process. In addition,, assessments done in this fashion are typically much more engaging and rewarding for clinicians, as they facilitate deeper connections with patients, and a sense that they have helped the patient, even in one session.

SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Organizations need to consider many different factors when deciding which screening and assessment tools they will ultimately use. First, they should know their specific goals for the screenings they are hoping to implement and establish clear ways to measure if they are meeting their goals. Screenings in and of themselves are rarely beneficial to the patient. Rather, it is the organization's response to screenings that is. Organizations should have clearly established pathways for further assessment and treatment when a screening tool indicates that additional clinical action is required. Moreover, organizations should have ways of evaluating the strength of these screenings, assessments, and subsequent treatment outcomes for patients. Second, organizations should consider patient literacy levels, cultural competency, and the specificity or sensitivity of screenings. If any gaps exist, there should be supports in place to help patients complete the screening. This might include having someone available to read the questionnaire to patients who may need assistance and having copies of the screening tool in other languages. Efforts should also be made to elicit feedback from patients about whether they find the screenings to be burdensome or invasive. Lastly, it is also critically important for the organization to consider how and when the screening will be administered. A screening that is operationally infeasible or will significantly impact the schedules and time of providers and staff will be essentially ineffective.

While there are many different types of screening and assessment tools, the following is a list of ones more commonly used in integrated settings. It is very important to remember that these are screening tools (and a few assessment tools) and are not considered to be diagnostic without a clinical interview. Any positive or threshold score on any of the following tools indicates a need for further assessment.

ADULT SCREENINGS:

- PHQ-2, PHQ-9 (Depression)
- GAD-7 (Generalized Anxiety Disorder)
- MDQ (Bipolar Disorder)
- SHA (Alcohol pre-screen)
- CAGE-AID (Alcohol and other drugs)
- DAST (Drug use, does not include alcohol)
- AUDIT-C (Alcohol only)
- UNCOPE-Plus, etc. (Alcohol and other drugs)
- Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS)
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

PEDIATRIC SCREENINGS:

- Pediatric Symptom Checklist (Emotional and Behavioral issues)
- ASQ (Developmental issues)
- M-CHAT (Autism)

- PHQ-9 (13 and up)

PEDIATRIC ASSESSMENTS:

- Vanderbilt (ADHD; r/o on anxiety and conduct difficulties; self-administered by parent and teacher)
- SNAP IV (ADHD; r/o anxiety and conduct difficulties; self-administered by parent and teacher)
- ASQ-SE (Parent completes if they are concerned about infant – 5 year old behavior. It can also be used as screening tool but there are usually time constraints in primary care setting)

ASSESSMENTS FOR SPECIFIC POPULATIONS:

- Opioid Risk Tool (Assess risk for chronic pain patients abusing opioid medications)
- Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MOCA) (Cognitive functioning issues. Completed partly by patient, but mostly by the clinician asking questions with specific wording)
- Mini Mental Status Exam (MMSE) (Administered to assess cognitive impairment)

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CLINICAL INTERVENTIONS

ESTABLISHING AN EFFECTIVE THERAPEUTIC ALLIANCE

The therapeutic alliance refers to the relationship between the clinician and the patient and it is characterized by empathy, collaboration, trust, genuineness, and affirmation. A strong therapeutic alliance is undeniably the most important predictor of positive care outcomes. It far outweighs any other variable in treatment, including a patient's specific diagnosis or impairment and the intervention method that is used.

This is because, in therapy, patients are sharing about and working through some of the most difficult parts of their lives. In order to make progress, they have to not only be able to trust their therapist, but they also have to be able to trust that no matter how difficult the therapy may get, the therapy will work. Fundamentally, they can't trust that the therapy will work without fully trusting their relationship with their therapist. With this, it is also important to consider that the vast majority of the time, patients are in therapy because of their difficulties with relationships with others. Without attention being paid to creating a trusting and empathetic relationship between the patient and the therapist, healing cannot occur. Research affirms these assertions, with studies consistently demonstrating that patients who rate their relationships with their therapist highly tend to be those who are most committed to the therapeutic process, sticking around long enough to reap its benefits and tolerate the sometimes very painful feelings that therapy can bring up.

Therefore, creating and maintaining a therapeutic alliance is a skill that most therapists continually work on throughout their career with education, training, and patient feedback. While it is a complex endeavor that requires skills that are built on over time and with experience, there are evidenced-based recommendations for how to establish a strong therapeutic alliance, most of which focus on the first impression and the first session.

FIRST IMPRESSION:

Maintain an orderly, comfortable, office space that demonstrates warmth and care for the patient. Although it might seem obvious that the ambiance of a treatment room would have a significant impact on how the patient feels, there is also research to support the assumption. Studies have indicated that an organized office with a "warm" feel increases a patient's feelings of confidence in their therapist, while a cluttered, cramped, or messy office decreases their sense of trust in their clinician. The individual preferences of the therapist and policies of the organization will vary, but in general, it is important to consider the lighting, the placement of supplies and books, the chairs and furniture, as well as the artwork on the walls ([Patient Care Offices in Integrated Behavioral Health Settings](#))

Warmly greet the patient when gathering them from the waiting room or meeting them in an exam room. Greet patients verbally, with a genuine smile, and eye contact when first meeting them. This greeting should consist of a salutation, the patient's name (whenever possible), and an official introduction to the clinician. This is the first impression a patient has of a clinician, whether they are literally meeting them for the first time or whether they are seeing them as the first interaction of a new session. It is of primary importance that clinicians connect with patients in the most basic of ways - looking them in the eye, greeting them with a smile, and showing them goodwill.

Greet the family members of the patient, including and especially children, in the same way you would greet a patient. Maintain eye contact and a genuine smile to show empathy and respect for a patient's family. Not

only does this reflect how they believe we feel about them, but it is also important social and relationship modeling.

Walk with the patient, not ahead of them or behind them, on the way to the office. How one chooses to walk with a patient can either indicate a partnership (shoulder to shoulder) or a power differential (leader/follower, teacher/student, etc).

Attend to the patient's (and any family member's) comfort. Offer them a comfortable place to sit, water, toys or coloring supplies for children, and when a patient (or one of their family members) appears to be in pain, inquire as to what you might do to make them feel more comfortable. For example, if a patient appears cold or hot, offer them an appropriate response, such as a blanket, cold water, to open a door, or close a window.

FIRST SESSION:

Ask open-ended questions. Asking, "Tell me more about your family" as opposed to "How many children do you have and how long have you been with your boyfriend?" allows the patient to guide the clinician to the important aspects of their lives. It indicates that the clinician is following their lead, not imposing their own agenda on the visit. In general, open-ended questions are considered to be the gold standard of assessment and skilled interpersonal interaction.

Avoid standard assessment tools, especially during the first visit, and do not separate assessment from treatment. By nature of their design, standard assessment forms pose close-ended questions and reflect our own (or the system's) agenda. They tend to increase patient passivity and therefore decrease the amount of important disclosures. This negatively impacts both the assessment and the therapeutic alliance. Instead, the clinician should ask open-ended questions, use reflective listening, and guide the conversation to particular assessment topics. This places more attention on the therapeutic alliance than answering formulated questions. During this assessment process, the therapist should also be intervening clinically. Research indicates that when assessment is separated from treatment, it correlates with higher dropout rates and more negative patient outcomes. Assessments should instead be continual. When formal assessment forms must be completed due to system constraints, it is important to mitigate the damage to the therapeutic alliance by completing them at the end of session and explicitly "changing hats" - for example, the clinician can say "I do have a bit of business and paperwork to attend to in order for me to get some important information. Since we have about 5-10 minutes left of our visit, could we do it now?". ([Screening and Assessment](#))

Use reflective listening and avoid evaluative statements. Reflective listening is an evidenced-based strategy to convey empathy. It involves the clinician reflecting what they have heard back to the patient, using some of the exact words of the patient has expressed. It is a powerful tool in helping clinicians avoid evaluative statements, such as "That wasn't right for your mom to say that to you", or "Having someone close to you die is a horrible thing". These types of statements tend to interpret how a patient feels for them and are barriers to the therapeutic alliance. Reflective listening is a highly developed skill that typically involves many hours of continued practice. It can seem tricky to use reflective listening when a patient says things like "I'm so tired of coming here and never feeling any better". Reflecting back "You're tired of not feeling any better" or "You feel frustrated about coming here and not getting any better" can feel counterintuitive or even scary. But with an empathetic tone and facial expression (and lots of practice!) a skilled therapist will know how to proceed. Moreover, reflective listening gives the patient a chance to correct the therapist. If the therapist did not accurately capture the patient's sentiment, the patient can correct them by saying something like "No, not frustrated, just tired". The therapist can go from there.

Demonstrate empathy skillfully. There are many ways to demonstrate empathy, in addition to the ones outlined above. One of the most important ways is to avoid conveying judgment about the patient or their behaviors and beliefs. It is natural for this to be difficult, as each clinician holds their own biases and judgments, but is important to leave these comments and opinions out of the therapy session and save them for discussion during clinical supervision.

Elicit feedback from the patient. Ask the patient about their perceptions of the therapist, therapy, and therapeutic alliance throughout the treatment process. There is strong research to support that eliciting feedback from patients consistently and skillfully is related to the strength of the therapeutic alliance and therefore, positive treatment outcomes. Scott Miller (ScottdMiller.com) has spent his career developing tools and resources to assess the therapeutic alliance during the visit. Clinicians find his writings and tools to be very helpful for their practice. However, even without formal tools, clinicians can elicit feedback from the patient by asking things like “I wonder how it felt for you today to talk about [x, y, or z] with me?” or “I wonder if you can share with me how you feel this session went for you?”

Affirm the patient’s strengths. Sometimes called the “strengths focus”, affirming is the act of seeing and communicating a patient’s strengths, as opposed to their pathologies, to them directly. For many therapists, this comes naturally, but for others it may take some practice, as it is sometimes hard to remember that the patient is more than a complicated diagnosis or series of problems. For example, a patient may have a diagnosis of bi-polar disorder but they may also be a person who gets their children to school every day, conveys deep care about their pet, makes therapy appointments regularly, or has a great sense of humor!

DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE MEDICAL TEAM AND PATIENTS

One of the first things behavioral health providers tend to be faced with when working in integrated medical settings, is a medical provider or staff member asking them to deal with a “difficult patient”. This could be a patient who is becoming escalated, a patient who is not following the medical provider's treatment recommendations as they wish, or a patient who may be requesting a specific medication and is perceived as “drug seeking”. These sorts of interactions are complex and can undoubtedly put stress on the entire healthcare system, however, it is important to recognize that the term “difficult patient” is fundamentally problematic, for a number of reasons.

First, often times, patients who are labeled as “difficult” are on the receiving end of implicit or explicit bias because of their demographic (such as those who have histories of incarceration, belong to a certain ethnic group, religious affiliation, or socio-economic status) or condition (such as those who have addictive disorders, chronic pain, obesity, or bi-polar disorder). Relatedly, research shows that what constitutes a “difficult patient” is different for everyone, depending on their specific life experiences, expertise, and personal history. In other words, while a patient with a severe addictive disorder who tends to use a loud voice and aggressive statements to get their needs met may be extremely difficulty for one nurse to treat (perhaps because she grew up in a home with a father who had an addictive disorder and had a history of getting angry), but quite easy to treat for another nurse (perhaps because she has received specific training around addictive disorders and how to interact with people who are angry). Moreover, when providers or staff feed into the idea of the “difficult patient”, the healthcare team and the entire organization suffers. Providers may transfer patients to one another when they feel that they are not capable of working with a particular person. They may fall into “splitting” the medical team, making one member of the team seem like the “bad cop” while they play “good cop” to solve the patient's problems. Not only does this contribute to providers' feeling an overall lack of support and trust within the medical team, but it can affect patient care, as frustrated providers may consciously or unconsciously treat the patient worse. At its worse, splitting can lead to patient complaints, grievances, and even litigation against the organization.

The good news is that with appropriate training and support, organizations can overcome the idea of the “difficult patient” and its effects. Once providers have confidence in interacting with patients who may present with difficult communication styles or behaviors, everyone's jobs become easier and patient health outcomes are less likely to be jeopardized. The following are specific high-value areas of support and interventions for staff, providers, and the organization as a whole, to increase insight and decrease stress around difficult provider-patient relationships.

COMBATTING NEGATIVE BIAS TOWARDS PATIENTS:

Develop a basic understanding of personality disorders and other stigmatizing conditions. Generally, in medical settings there tends to be less expertise, experience and confidence in managing relationships and interactions with those who have been historically stigmatized, as well as those who have conditions that take a higher level of skill to effectively manage, such as personality disorders. Having formal learning and development opportunities around the history of stigma towards behavioral health conditions, debunking common myths about treatment and recovery, as well as specific skills-based training around how to treat specific conditions can help increase providers' confidence in working with particular patients or populations. In addition to formal trainings, behavioral health providers can also provide education through micro-trainings in huddles or staff meetings, through modeling of their own behavior (modeling empathy as well as boundaries when appropriate and avoiding unprofessional talk or gossip about patients) and documentation (such as avoiding use of stigmatizing words and phrases. See [Documentation and Billing](#) section for more information). These practices

will likely allow empathy and compassion for patients to grow at the organization, which is fundamental to healthcare. For example, when medical providers (and all people, more generally) learn that conditions such as Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) typically arise from extreme childhood trauma, and insufficient early childhood bonding, they develop a more understanding perspective towards people who present with BPD symptoms. Behavioral health providers can remind the medical team of this in real time, pointing out that a patient might not be 'manipulative' but rather, may be just using a defense mechanism or coping skill that has worked for them to get their needs met in the past.

Encourage self-identification of bias and countertransference. Unlike the medical field, the behavioral health field has historically placed a significant focus on self-reflection. In supervision and independently, behavioral health providers make a commitment to identifying and exploring how their own biases, judgements, and countertransference are operating in treatment, as well as what they can do to mitigate their effects on patient care. This process helps them understand and then re-frame why they may find certain patients, symptoms, or diagnoses "difficult". The support they receive from supervisors also creates an environment where they can talk openly about any countertransference that may be present, without shame. Behavioral health providers can model this process for medical providers and encourage all staff to engage in the same sort of self-reflection when they feel that they have a "difficult patient". It is important to normalize the idea that we all have biases and that by identifying our biases, and committing to mitigating them, we can decrease our stress in working with those we may find challenging and improve patient care. The research on bias in the healthcare field, the enormously negative impact it has on health outcomes, and how to mitigate it with "counter-cues" is robust and fascinating. More resources about the impact of bias in the healthcare setting can be found at the bottom of this page.

Initiate behavioral health "team lead" for particular patients when necessary. When a behavioral health concern seems to be the primary presenting problem for a patient and their interactions or behaviors are interfering with the team's ability or willingness to provide quality care, consider whether instituting a behavioral health clinician as the team lead for the patient's care could be beneficial. Just as primary care providers are the de-facto clinical team leaders for medical conditions (because they are the most educated and experienced in medical matters and hold a license to treat medical conditions), behavioral health providers can be the 'primary care providers' for patients whose concerns or presentation are primarily behavioral health related. Usually leading' the team entails communicating with the patient to let the patient know this is the case, being the primary contact for the patient, seeing the patient first when they come in for care, sometimes being present in the exam room when the patient is receiving medical care if necessary, calling formal or informal case conferences to adjust the treatment plan as needed, and providing education and support to medical team members regarding the patient's condition(s). Additionally, the behavioral health team lead can purposefully intervene to avoid the staff splitting that can occur with patients with BPD, or other patients with this pattern. Prevention or early intervention on splitting can include ensuring the entire team remains on the same page with each other, setting boundaries and limits with the patient that the whole team agrees to enforce, and providing the team with process-related insights, increasing team understanding of how patients with BPD impact those around them.

In addition to patients with BPD, or other personality disorder characteristics, having a behavioral health lead can be particularly helpful in cases such as working with a patient who consistently escalates in anger when interacting with the team, those who may be in active prescription opioid addiction, or patients whose symptoms seem to be more likely due to hypochondriasis or another somatic disorder. The sentiments of the medical team can also be a criteria for having a behavioral health team lead. For example, if the medical team indicates strong dread when seeing a patient, identifies difficulty setting boundaries with a patient, shares that they have trouble ending visits or conversations with a patient who they feel talks excessively, can all be reasons to consider a behavioral health team lead.

Having a behavioral health provider as the team lead in these cases can alleviate some of the stress on the medical team and ensure that the patient gets the best care possible. It should be noted that one of the goals of integrated care is to increase the skill and comfort of the medical staff in interacting with patients they may have previously identified as 'difficult'. For this reason, ideally behavioral health providers as team leads avoid taking over all communications with the patient, and instead, help build knowledge, skills and confidence of the medical team in their interactions with the patient. Behavioral health providers can help medical work through issues of bias and countertransference as well. Transferring a patient to another medical team is a last resort, usually only occurring when a staff member discloses feeling fearful of a patient, or share that their countertransference will greatly interfere with their ability to effectively provide treatment or maintain boundaries.

ADDITIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES:

- The Empathy Effect: Mitigating Bias to Improve Healthcare Outcomes- The Institute for Healthcare Communication www.healthcarecomm.org
- Difficult Clinician-Patient Relationships: The Institute for Healthcare Communication www.healthcarecomm.org

THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CLINICIAN’S ROLE IN CHRONIC DISEASE MANAGEMENT

A chronic disease is a long-lasting condition that can be controlled but not cured. About half of all adults—117 million people—have one or more chronic health conditions. However, this number is probably conservative, as it does not specifically include mental illness and addiction as stand-alone chronic diseases or consider that 7 out of 10 primary care population visits are related to chronic disease. The Center for Disease Control states:

“Chronic disease is the leading cause of death and disability in the United States. It accounts for 70% of all deaths in the U.S., which is 1.7 million each year. Data from the World Health Organization show that chronic disease is also the major cause of premature death around the world even in places where infectious disease is rampant.”

In addition to what are typically thought of as chronic diseases, mental health conditions and addictive disorders also commonly meet the definition of chronic disease. Many are long lasting and can be controlled, but not cured. The American Society of Addictive Medicine even defines addictive disorders as a chronic disease. Moreover, the interaction between mental health conditions (such as depressive and anxious disorders) and addictive disorders (such as substance abuse, food addiction, process addictions) is profound and complex, with research demonstrating that any one of these diseases seemingly worsens the other.

Therefore, seeing patients with who have chronic disease is nothing new for mental health clinicians in any setting. However, for clinicians working in integrated settings, where the focus is on the whole-health of patients, a more active role is placed in addressing chronic conditions.

FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR CHRONIC DISEASE INTERVENTION:

Assess and intervene based on the patient’s acceptance level. When a patient has chronic depression, PTSD, diabetes, chronic pain, or another chronic condition, it is important for clinicians to understand how high their acceptance level is, or how aware they are of their disease and the attention it requires. Acceptance in this sense does not correspond with agreeing or liking their condition, but rather with how they feel about it and relate to it. For example, whether a patient is resentful (low acceptance), does not believe they have a chronic condition (very low acceptance), or believes it can be “cured” and that they won’t have to manage it anymore (also low acceptance). Alternatively, those with higher acceptance are less angry, sad, and resentful. They generally believe that they have a condition that needs attention, but that it is manageable. Understanding a patient’s acceptance level is important, as those with low acceptance levels are rarely motivated to care for their condition. Assessing a patient’s acceptance level can be done skillfully with open-ended questions or a scale of 1-10 - with 1 being “you have no peace with your chronic pain, you frequently feel very angry about it, or forget to do the things that help it” and 10 being “you feel at peace with your condition and feel very good about the daily or weekly activities you engage in to manage it” (more resources about measuring patient acceptance level are included in the [Resources for Further Exploration](#) section. When a patient’s acceptance level is very low, various strategies can be employed in to increase it, from motivational interviewing, to CBT, PST and others intervention strategies found in this manual.

Work as a member of a team, not just a solo practitioner. Electronic health records allow team members to see how their patients are managing their chronic diseases. Primary care providers can see a behavioral health clinician’s notes about whether a patient with schizophrenia is taking medications regularly, keeping appointments, continuing high levels of support with NAMI and family, and if their symptoms have stabilized. Likewise, behavioral health clinicians can see a primary care provider’s notes about whether a patient who is diabetic is coming in regularly, losing weight, and managing to keep their blood sugar under 7. Whether

clinicians are using the Electronic Health Record or communicating verbally, working as a team ensures that each provider has a fuller picture of how their patient is doing in different areas, and therefore can tailor their interventions appropriately.

Elicit the patient's goals, beliefs, preferences, and strengths. Deciding on patient goals is fairly easy when it comes to chronic diseases, as there are often distinct markers for what is healthy and what is not. However, patient empowerment, activation, and motivation only truly come from the patients setting their own goals, in the context of their beliefs and preferences, and in accordance with their strengths. Asking open-ended questions, reflective listening, and affirming strengths are core techniques that can be used to elicit these goals in practice.

Shape understandings and beliefs about the meaning of "chronic". Assisting patients in gaining an understanding of, and increasing motivation for, lifelong self-management is critical to intervention around chronic disease. Many patients with chronic conditions have misunderstandings, or sometimes complete misconceptions, about their condition. They may not know they have a chronic condition or they may believe that it can be cured and pursue extreme or unlivable treatments instead of developing sustainable, healthy, self-care habits. All of this leads to frequent relapses in self-care and a recurrence of symptoms. The goal is therefore to re-shape the patient's perception of their disease and help them understand that it can be managed.

Assist patients with health maintenance and relapse prevention. Research indicates that with most chronic diseases, the more relapses a person has, the more severe the relapses are, and the more apt they are to have relapses again in the future. Preventing relapse, then, becomes a primary goal of intervention with chronic disease patients. It involves practicing maintenance, identifying relapse warning signs, and developing relapse prevention plans. For example, it is not uncommon for a patient to believe that once they reach their goal weight or their blood sugar is controlled, they can stop their maintenance activities (taking insulin, exercising daily, etc.). However, clinicians should work to help the patient identify the signs that they are moving away from their self-management activities and heading towards relapse. They can then assist them with developing an action plan to intervene on themselves, before a relapse occurs.

Help patients make healthy behavior changes to support the management of their condition. The behavior changes needed to live a full, healthy, life are different for every patient and based on their specific values, goals, and strengths. They might range from weight loss or yelling at their kids less often to smoking cessation or increased church attendance. All of these behavior changes have impacts on their health and each small, sustainable, change contributes to larger ongoing changes. Intervening to facilitate these changes with techniques such as Motivational Interviewing and CBT is one of the most common responsibilities of behavioral health clinicians who are working with patients who have chronic diseases.

ADDICTIVE DISORDERS INTERVENTION

Addictive disorders encompass everything from substance use, including Nicotine, to eating disorders, compulsive disorder conditions, and process addictions, such as gambling and sex. About 10% of the general population and between 20%-50% of those who end up coming into a health clinic setting suffer from an addictive disorder. However, historically, the treatment of addictive disorders and behavioral health conditions was kept separate. There were different facilities for physical health and addictive disorder treatment and the disciplines and workforces were bifurcated. In integrated settings today, treating addictive disorders in conjunction with behavioral health and physical health conditions is a necessity. It is simply not feasible to rely on referrals to outside specialists for the number of patients who need treatment. Moreover, the majority of those with addictive disorders also have concomitant mental and physical health issues that need attention. Deferring treatment for disorders that require continuous, comprehensive care, not just acute, specialty treatment, can result in adverse outcomes in patient care.

STIGMA AND ADDICTIVE DISORDERS:

Addictive disorders often elicit strong negative opinions from the general population and those who work in healthcare are no exception. Even when medical and behavioral health providers have had formal education about the etiology and epidemiology of addiction, many still have deep-seated bias towards addictive disorders. This bias can manifest itself in treatment in a number of ways - a lack of curiosity or interest in treating patients with addictive disorders, stereotyping of patients, and the use of stigmatizing language in written documentation or communicated verbally between providers, and even to patients directly. Stigma can also be seen in care systems that automatically refer patients with addictive disorders "out" without proper assessment or those that recommend courses of treatment that are inconsistent with best practices, such as withholding medications for those who have a history of addiction. Organizations as employers also show bias towards addictive disorders. They may have employee wellness campaigns that avoid the mention of addiction, EAP programs that fail to provide a sufficient network of addictive disorder treatment providers and human resources benefit packages that address dental, eye, medical and mental health benefits, but do not mention addictive disorder assistance. They may even have policies that automatically exclude job candidates that have substance related legal infractions on their record.

Overall there is robust research around addictive disorders and stigma. When looking at substance use disorders specifically, a recent SAMHSA study showed that although stigma around mental health conditions has decreased over the past 10 years, stigma around substance use disorders has increased. (<https://www.samhsa.gov/capt/sites/default/files/resources/sud-stigma-tool.pdf>) Considering the paramount role stigma plays on all levels of care for addictive disorders, it is important to work to challenge myths about treatment and increase providers' overall comfort with and competency for treating those with addictive disorders.

MYTHS ABOUT TREATING ADDICTIVE DISORDERS:

Treating addiction requires a highly specialized and completely separate skill set than my own. Evidenced-based addiction intervention is comprised of many of the same skill sets used to treat other conditions. It involves building a strong therapeutic alliance, skillful patient-centered listening, behavior change interventions, such as motivational interviewing, skilled care coordination, and the like. While there a some additional specialized knowledge required to treat addictive disorders, it can be learned and implemented fairly easily and efficiently for those who are motivated to do so.

It's not my job and I don't have the time. Due to the prevalence and overlap of mental health, addictive, and physical health conditions, it not feasible to place addictive disorder treatment outside of the mental health or primary care setting. Addictions share many of the same characteristics as any other chronic diseases, such as severe anxiety, COPD, and diabetes. They all can feel overwhelming and time consuming to providers, and even more so when providers are not confident in treating the diseases. Behavioral health providers in an integrated setting, however, cannot continue to consider addictive disorders outside their scope of expertise. Any behavioral health condition that affects over 20% of the population seeking primary care can and should be within the scope of what an integrated clinician is competent in treating. As stated above, the good news is that many clinical skills and evidenced-based interventions that behavioral health (and medical providers) use regularly are core interventions for addictive disorders, as well.

Addiction treatment must be done by someone who is in recovery themselves. This is a hotly debated topic, especially in California, where the "social model" of addiction treatment, which relies on peer counselors to provide the majority of addiction treatment, was adopted some years ago. However, there is ample evidence to show that there is no difference in the therapeutic effectiveness of someone who is in recovery and someone who is not. In fact, research shows, time and time again, that the most important moderator in treatment outcomes is the clinician's ability to develop and sustain an effective therapeutic alliance with a patient ([Establishing an Effective Therapeutic Alliance](#)).

It is just hopeless. They won't get better. Many times, medical and behavioral health staff feel hopeless when treating addictive disorders, like the chances of recovery are slim to none. This might be because many helping professionals have lost people to addiction, both personally and professionally. Their lack of hope for recovery might be a way for them to protect themselves from the very real fear of losing someone to the disease. It might also be because they see those with addictive disorders as lying or deceitful people instead of having a chronic disease that often entails hiding the truth (just as someone with diabetes may withhold information about their diet from a doctor). Other times, providers might believe that the patient's addiction is their "choice" and that the patient therefore has some sort of moral failings for because of their addiction. For providers, these judgments inevitably lead to feelings of hopelessness and futility about treating addictive disorders and narrow one's ability to examine the personal, familial, and environmental factors that contribute to the disorder, which in turn, contribute to an overall dehumanization of the patient. The good news is that when evidence-based interventions are used, treatment outcomes for addiction are just as good, if not better, than the treatment outcomes for other chronic diseases and conditions. In fact, relapse rates (defined as stopping self-management behaviors and the return of symptoms) are higher for asthma and hypertension than they are for addictive disorders.

Abstinence is the only appropriate treatment goal. The question of abstinence as a treatment goal most often comes up in discussions around substance use disorders specifically, however it can be applied to behavioral/process addictions more generally, as well. While someone with a binge eating disorder will never abstain from food entirely, the question of whether they need to abstain from one food, such as sugar, completely (when sugar is the food that invariably triggers binging) or whether they can learn to eat sugar "normally" provokes the same discussion as whether someone who has a severe alcohol use disorder can ever drink "normally" again. For those with substance use disorders, the literature indicates that while the majority of patients who have developed a severe addiction will not be able to use substances normally or socially again, some patients may be able return to what is defined as safe or appropriate drinking or drug use, without consequences. There are even community support groups that are congruent with this "harm reduction" approach, such as Rational Recovery. The term "harm reduction" generally refers to a public health philosophy and set of practices that seek to minimize individual and societal harm from a variety of behaviors, such as drug use or sexual activity. Needle exchange programs that lower the risk of HIV transmission, designated driver campaigns that lower the likelihood of auto related casualties due to drunk driving, and non-abstinence based

interventions such as Methadone or buprenorphine maintenance treatments, are all examples of well-known harm reduction strategies. More broadly, harm reduction has also been used to describe a goal of having someone “cut down” on the amount of cigarettes they smoke per day or lessen the amount of alcohol they drink to reduce the negative impacts that substance has on their life and community. Harm reduction strategies are controversial and polarizing in the addiction treatment field because there are many providers who are firmly in the “abstinence camp” and many just as firmly in the “cutting down” camp. Of course, one problem with having a fixed core belief about what treatment is right for all patients, is that it confirms bias and keeps us from seeing alternative options for those patients who do not fit perfectly into our belief system. Another problem is that it can lead to the misapplication of treatment interventions, which can result in more harm to the patient. For example, when someone with a severe addictive disorder is told by a therapist that they shouldn’t even try to abstain, but instead just cut down, it often strengthens the patient’s hope that they may be able to use normally, even if they have no history of being able to use in a controlled manner in the past. This approach can keep them from radically accepting that they are not able to use the substance as others do and can delay or destroy their chances for recovery. Similarly, if someone with a long term opioid disorder presents for treatment to a therapist who firmly believes maintenance therapies, such as buprenorphine and methadone, are equivalent to continued drug use and that abstinence is the only definition of recovery, it can delay or prevent the chances of the patient receiving an evidenced based treatment for opiate addiction. In substance use disorders as well as other addictive disorders, in order to avoid the possibility of harming a patient because of a clinician’s own beliefs, it is imperative that the individual patient’s needs, goals, and strengths be prioritized over the clinician’s and that the best evidence base of research be used to make proper assessment and treatment recommendations.

CORE SKILLS FOR INTERVENTION:

Develop a strong therapeutic alliance and skillfully convey empathy. Although it this has been mentioned many times throughout the manual, developing a strong therapeutic alliance and knowing how to skillfully convey empathy cannot be overemphasized ([Establishing an Effective Therapeutic Alliance](#)). In considering addictive disorders specifically, empathy conveyance has been proven by research to be particularly important. Higher levels of empathy correlate with positive outcomes for patients while lower levels of empathy correlate with poorer outcomes, even when compared to no treatment at all. Additionally, almost all data needed to properly assess and diagnose a patient comes from self-disclosures and self-disclosures have been shown to be almost entirely dependent on the patient’s perception that the staff or provider they are with and whether that prover has non-judgmental positive regard and empathy for them.

Use Motivational Interviewing. Motivational interviewing is defined by Stephen Rollnick and William Miller as “a directive, patient-centered, counseling style for eliciting behavior change by helping patients explore and resolve ambivalence”. As with nearly all clinical interventions, developing an empathic connection, or a therapeutic alliance, is the foundation of Motivational Interviewing. However, compared with nondirective counseling, it is more focused and goal-directed. Its central purpose is to examine and resolve ambivalence and the counselor is intentionally directive in pursuing this goal. Motivational Interviewing was born out of the addiction field and its effectiveness has been studied extensively. For more information about Motivational Interviewing and further reading on the research surrounding its effectiveness, please see the [Motivational Interviewing](#) and [Resources for Further Exploration](#) sections, respectively ([Motivational Interviewing](#), [Resources for Further Exploration](#)).

Develop an understanding of process addictions. The term “process addiction” is often used to describe behavioral addictions that do not involve alcohol or other drugs. A behavioral addiction could be a compulsive behavior, such as excessive gambling, a sexual addiction, eating disorder, spending addiction, or internet addiction (gaming or pornography). The field’s understanding of process addictions is continually evolving, and the

American Society of Addiction Medicine updated its definition of addiction to be inclusive of process addictions in 2011. It reads:

*“Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use **and other behaviors**”.*

There has been a dramatic increase in the study of process addictions in the last 10 years, with the publication of research articles on the topic quadrupling between 2014 and 2017. There is even an academic journal dedicated solely to process addictions called the Journal of Behavioral Addictions. The DSM V significantly restructured the substance use disorder section, with pathological gambling now with substance use disorders, under the new heading of “Addiction and Related Disorders”. Internet gaming disorder was identified for future research and, although sexual addiction was not, it was officially recognized by the American Society of Addiction Medicine as a legitimate addiction. While there are divergent opinions in the field about the differences between process addictions and substance addictions, one common area of agreement is that the chemical processes that occur in the brain during the behavior or “process” of the addiction are very similar to the chemical processes that occur during a use of a substance in a substance addiction. With this, the symptomology is very similar in both. Further, there is research that indicates the stigma (both self-stigma and societal stigma) surrounding process addictions is even higher than that of substance addictions. Process addictions are even more likely to be attributed to poor character and weak willpower. For clinicians, this indicates a special need to skillfully elicit information about a patient’s process addiction with empathic prompting, as patients may be less likely to disclose their concerns. Clinicians must also carefully reflect on their own personal beliefs about the addiction, before responding to the patient in order to avoid shaming the patient or dismissing a process disorder as “not really an addiction” to a patient who is, in fact, suffering all the symptoms of an addictive disorder.

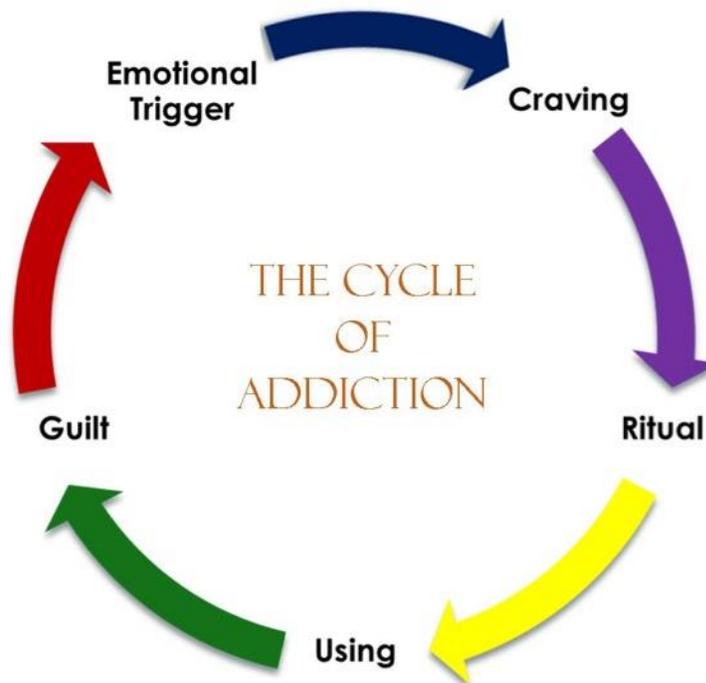
Know how to properly assess and diagnose addictive disorders. Thorough knowledge of the DSM-V symptoms and criteria for substance use disorders and related addictive conditions is part of the baseline knowledge necessary for all behavioral health and medical providers working in any setting. Providers should also be well aware of the appropriate screening and assessment tools used in addictive disorder diagnosis and treatment. Some organizations may have instituted universal screenings for alcohol or other drugs use and have general protocols for addressing those who need further assessment (such as when a patient has screened positive). However, other organizations may not utilize a set screening tool or engage in screenings at all. In California, SBIRT (Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral and Treatment for Alcohol Use Disorders) is mandatory in a good deal of settings, however, organizations should strive to screen for more than one substance. Adopting a broader screening tools, such as the CAGE-AID (for alcohol and other drugs) the Modified CAGE-AID (alcohol, other drugs, binge eating disorder, nicotine addiction and gambling disorders) or the Substance Use Screening and Progress tool (SUSAP), which screens for alcohol and other drugs, means that the organization will be more likely to properly assess for patient need for treatment. Broader screenings also intervene to decrease stigma for particular substances. For example, Nicotine and food addiction are typically not as stigmatized as amphetamine or opioid addictions, so by combining substances and/or process addictions, the screening tool itself becomes an intervention.

Regarding assessment, it is important to remember that when formal assessment tools are utilized, they should always be used in conjunction with a clinical interview. Clinical interviews are particularly important because, when done in a skilled and empathetic way, they help build the therapeutic alliance and elicit more meaningful information from the patient. Unlike most assessment tools, clinical interviewing involves the use of open-ended questions- (what the Institute of Medicine calls the “gold standard” of communication) which, in

conjunction with other empathy-conveying techniques, elicit more accurate, detailed, and important self-disclosures.

It is also important for behavioral health clinicians to obtain knowledge and skills that allow them to effectively evaluate differential diagnoses and co-morbid conditions. For example, it can take substantial knowledge and skills to assess whether a patient has a mood disorder, if the depressed mood is secondary to the alcohol addiction, or if the patient has two primary diagnoses, alcohol use disorder and depression. Another common example is assessing whether someone's auditory hallucinations may be related to a schizophrenia spectrum disorder, thought disorder, chronic amphetamine use, or a combination of all. One of the dangers in any clinical assessment is the old adage "if all you have is a hammer, everything is a nail". In other words, clinicians tend to diagnose the problem they feel most confident in treating. This is where deep, purposeful addictive disorders knowledge and experience acquisition is imperative, to avoid the common tendency of clinicians highly trained in mental health conditions, but not in addictive disorders, to that assume all substance use is self-medication for a mental health condition. This tendency, to consider mental health conditions as primary, and substance use disorders as secondary, can cause substantial harm to a patient when it is inaccurate. In the same way, an substance use disorder specialist may have a tendency to see mental health conditions as a result of substance use and neglect to provide or arrange for concurrent mental health treatment.

Knowledge of the Addiction Cycle. When beginning to treat addictive disorders, it is important to understand the addiction cycle. Patrick Carnes, who is an expert in sex addiction, first developed this very useful conceptual model of the stages of compulsivity in addiction.



There are many different versions of the addiction cycle, but most see addiction as a process that begins with a trigger and is followed by a physical craving that includes fantasizing or obsessing. There is then some sort of ritual preparation, followed by the use of the substance or partaking in the behavior itself, and then ultimately a consequence, which at the least, usually includes feelings of guilt and shame.

Have a knowledge and understanding of mutual self-help groups. Having a working knowledge of mutual self-help groups can be a particularly useful resource for clinicians treating patients with addictive disorders. The breadth and depth of these peer support groups is truly stunning. There are 12-step groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, church-based groups such as Celebrate Recovery, secular groups such as Life-Ring, and non-abstinence based groups such as Rational Recovery. Alcoholics Anonymous alone has about 2 million members and 100,000 regular meetings worldwide. Its model has also been adopted to create other 12-step groups for those with drug addictions, food addictions, gambling addictions, sex and love addictions, and even those who are affected by people with addictions, such as Al-anon and Adult Children of Alcoholics. Celebrate Recovery is a church-based peer support group for those with multiple addictive disorders and is in 20,000 churches across the US. Life-Ring and Rational Recovery have active groups in most cities as well. Some programs, like 12-step groups, are explicitly spiritual (though not specifically Christian), some, like Celebrate Recovery are church related, while others are not affiliated with any faith at all. All of these groups are non-professional and free.

For clinicians who do not have personal contact with these types of groups, it might be a bit difficult or confusing to understand their potential value to patients. Clinicians may have formed opinions about particular self-help groups based only on one or two patients' anecdotal reports, or even from the experience of someone in their personal life. Because there is so much variety between these types of groups, and even between groups within the same program, this usually isn't helpful or accurate. Sometimes clinicians hear that 12-step groups don't "allow" members to take prescribed medications (not accurate), or that groups insist members are Christian (not accurate). Clinicians might have heard that Life Ring is only for atheists (not accurate), or that someone has to be a member of the church to attend Celebrate Recovery (not accurate). What can be very helpful is for a clinician to make an effort to personally learn more about each program. They can read the approved literature of the groups, including the Alcoholics Anonymous "Big Book" or group websites, attend "open meetings" ("open meetings" are open to anyone, while "closed meetings" are only for those who are members), or call hotlines and the groups service numbers directly to ask them more questions. Self-help groups are autonomous, meaning every group functions on its own, using principles of the larger philosophy, but not governed by anyone. Self-help groups do not have anyone who is the leader, head, or boss of meetings, and there isn't any one person who speaks for the group. Instead, members rotate service positions in order to facilitate meetings and manage basic operations like paying rent or making coffee. This can sometimes seem confusing to those outside of the groups, yet these principles are the core of what makes a self-help group based program special and unique.

While these groups are not considered formal treatment and are not therapy groups, there is strong research to prove that those who are involved in peer support groups have improved outcomes in their battles with addiction. When referring patients to any of the wide variety of groups, it is important to remind the patient that each group is different. There are some that are best for women, LBGT, those with dual diagnosis, and the like. Because each group is autonomous from the larger program, each group develops its own unique "culture" and because groups are within the larger context of differing communities, the groups reflect the communities they are in, as well. As always, when making referrals, it is always best practice to elicit the patient's motivation and, if they express interest, provide important information to the patient about what the group might be like, and to make the initial phone call or referral to a group during that same session.

Develop the ability to assess the level of care needed for a patient, including recognizing the signs and symptoms of withdrawal from different addictive substances and behaviors. The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) placement criteria is the most comprehensive and widely used tool for helping clinicians determine the appropriate place for the treatment of a patient.



The graphic above shows that the dimensions of assessment that inform placement decisions are complex and that the particular substance of use is not a decision making factor in placement.

The graphic below shows the ASAM numerical continuum of care. ASAM provides detailed criteria, which distinguishes each stage.



Integrated settings can generally offer .5-1 (early intervention/education to outpatient services) and some organizations offer 1-1.5 (out-patient services to intensive outpatient services).

The ASAM dimensions of assessment and continuum of care graphics demonstrate the complexity of matching patients' needs, preferences, strengths, and supports to the appropriate treatment level.

Have a working understanding of the complexity, controversy and research base around abstinence and harm reduction philosophies. While sometimes abstinence and harm reduction are often poised as opposites, with proponents on both sides, it is important for clinicians to avoid 'claiming' a philosophy at the expense of individualized, patient centered treatment. The most decisive factor in what treatment goal is set, is of course the patient's own choice. However, there is considerable research to help clinicians guide patients in their goal setting. Generally speaking patients who have low severity addictive disorders are more likely to become moderate non-problem drinkers, while those who high severity tend to be unable to use moderately, making abstinence is a better goal. Clinicians who continually develop their understanding and knowledge in this complex and continually developing area will be more effective in assisting patients to set appropriate treatment goals and provide them effective intervention and support.

Know how and when to use and when to refer to Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT). MAT is a specific term that refers to the use of medications, in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies, to provide a whole-patient approach to the treatment of substance use disorders. Most of the time, MAT is used in opioid addiction treatments with medications such as Methadone or Suboxone (buprenorphine). However, more generally, MAT refers to any medication that is used during the treatment of an addiction or its symptoms, such as Naltrexone or Antabuse. Still, it is important to note that medications used to treat addictive disorders or their symptoms should not be considered as treatment by themselves. They should always be used in conjunction with behavioral health therapy. Behavioral health clinicians need to be vigilant to guard against addiction being narrowly defined as a physical condition. Many times, medical settings prioritize pharmacology

treatments as the primary or even the only necessary treatment. Behavioral health clinicians who work in integrated organizations that provide MAT typically should specifically work to develop a higher level of knowledge and understanding of this particular multi-disciplinary treatment method to ensure that behavioral health services are integrated as a primary component of MAT.

TRAUMA AND TRAUMA RELATED DISORDERS

The ways of thinking about and defining emotional trauma have changed radically over the years. Historically, trauma was associated almost solely with those who had direct experiences with war. In the 1960's, the definition was broadened to include those who had experienced physical and sexual abuse. However, in the last decade, advances in neurobiology and psychology have further broadened the definition, recognizing that trauma can result from any number of experiences, included deeply humiliating or disappointing incidents such as break ups with significant others, the deaths of loved ones, the loss of a job, car accidents, and the like. While trauma in childhood seems to demonstrate the most significant negative impacts on ones health and mental health, trauma that occurs during adulthood can also lead to the same symptoms and effects.

Most traumatic events have some common characteristics and regardless of their source, often contain these elements:

- The event or events that occurred involved actual, threatened and/or perceived harm, such as death or serious injury, to the self or others, and/or were experienced as a threat to the stability of one's world
- The event or events caused intense feelings of fear, helplessness, or horror
- The event or events were unexpected
- The person was unprepared

This illustrates that, fundamentally, traumatic experiences are not just the result of an event in and of itself. Rather, traumatic experiences are the result of a combination of the event and the person's reaction, interpretation, or appraisal of the event. This means that not everyone who experiences trauma, or even similar types of trauma, will develop Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or related symptomology. There are many factors (and still so much that is unknown) that contribute to whether someone does or does not develop trauma related disorders. Some factors that seem to "protect" people from developing trauma disorders are called "resilience factors". Conversely, "risk factors" seem to increase one's likelihood of developing PTSD and other trauma disorders.

EXAMPLES OF RESILIENCE FACTORS:

- Seeking out support from others before, during, after the traumatic event
- Higher levels of pre-trauma happiness
- Feeling good about one's actions in the midst of the trauma (for example not feeling guilty or ashamed)

EXAMPLES OF RISK FACTORS:

- Exposure to other previous traumatic events (see below)
- A history of mental health difficulties or a family history of mental health problems
- Having a significant amount of added stressors after the traumatic event
- Having little or no support before, during, or after the event

REACTIONS TO AND SYMPTOMS OF TRAUMA:

The reactions to and symptoms of trauma are broad, varied, and differ in severity from person to person. They might include intrusive memories and images (such as unwanted and persistent memories, flashbacks, or nightmares), avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma (such as avoiding places or situations that invoke memories of the trauma), exaggerated startle reflexes, negative changes in thinking, mood, and emotions (such as being on guard all the time or anxious), hopelessness, memory problems, and/or intense feelings of guilt or shame. During the period of time immediately after the trauma, known as the acute phase, symptoms also often include a sense of numbness, detachment, depersonalization, and even dissociative amnesia (such as not being able to recall all or part of the trauma). Overtime, those who have experienced trauma can also develop other distinct clinical and/or concurrent conditions, such as depression, general anxiety, panic attacks, and substance abuse. Especially when individuals are alone in their struggles, without support, help, care, or treatment, anxiety and depression can develop as a secondary response to the difficult symptoms being experienced.

Mental Health America and other organizations have characterized trauma and, similarly, "toxic stress", as the most pressing public health problem of our time, taking the place of the infectious disease epidemics in the toll on human suffering, sickness, disability and death. For more information on "toxic stress" see the [Resources for Further Exploration](#) section.

CHILDHOOD TRAUMA:

Research suggests that childhood trauma increases one's risk for developing both psychological disorders and physical health conditions throughout the life course. As outlined above, it increases one's risk for developing PTSD, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. However, it also increases one's risk for developing obesity, hypertension, COPD and diabetes. This is thought to be, in part, because childhood trauma occurs during the most sensitive and critical stages of psychological and physical development. Children who experience trauma often develop inadequate coping strategies to relieve their toxic stress and symptoms, such as over eating, drug and alcohol abuse, and other behaviors that lead to adverse health outcomes as adults. Moreover, trauma is also thought to have more direct impacts on the functioning of the immune system, endocrine system, and the brain. All of this contributes to the development of multiple and complex chronic diseases as the children grow older.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study is one of the largest investigations ever conducted to assess correlations between childhood trauma and other mistreatment on later-life health and well-being outcomes.

THE TRUTH ABOUT ACEs

WHAT ARE THEY?

ACEs are
ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

The three types of ACEs include

ABUSE	NEGLECT	HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION	
Physical Abuse	Physical Neglect	Mental Illness	Incarcerated Relative
Emotional Abuse	Emotional Neglect	Mother treated violently	Substance Abuse
Sexual Abuse		Divorce	

HOW PREVALENT ARE ACEs?

The ACE study revealed the following estimates:*

ABUSE

Physical Abuse	28.3%
Sexual Abuse	20.7%
Emotional Abuse	10.6%

percentage of study participants that experienced a specific ACE

NEGLECT

Emotional Neglect	14.8%
Physical Neglect	9.9%

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION

Household Substance Abuse	26.9%
Parental Divorce	23.3%
Household Mental Illness	19.4%
Mother Treated Violently	12.7%
Incarcerated Household Member	4.7%

WHAT IMPACT DO ACEs HAVE?

As the number of ACEs increases, so does the risk for negative health outcomes

RISK

0 ACEs 1 ACE 2 ACEs 3 ACEs 4+ ACEs

Possible Risk Outcomes:

BEHAVIOR				
Lack of physical activity	Smoking	Alcoholism	Drug use	Missed work
PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH				
Severe obesity	Diabetes	Depression	Suicide attempts	STDs
Heart disease	Cancer	Stroke	COPD	Broken bones

Of 17,000 ACE study participants:

rwjf.org/vulnerablepopulations

*Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/aces/prevalence.htm>

The study findings suggest that traumatic experiences during childhood are ultimately major risk factors for illness, disability, death, and overall poor quality of life as adults. The study also speaks to a “dose effect” where the more trauma one experiences, the larger amount of adverse health outcomes they will also experience later in life. More information on ACEs can also be found in the [Resources for Further Exploration](#) section.

SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT OF TRAUMATIC EVENTS:

Due to the large-scale dissemination of the ACEs Study, a lot has been written about the importance of screening for trauma in the medical setting. Some organizations choose to screen patients using the original ACEs research questions. These questions are highly personal and call upon the organization to have a thoroughly developed system for respectfully administering the screening and responding to the patient’s answers in a compassionate manner. Organizations that have decided to use the original ACEs questions to

screen the pediatric population have an even higher level of responsibility to ethically, legally, and empathically administer the screening and respond to positive screenings.

Most of the time, however, organizations use certain symptom-based screenings for depression, anxiety, and substance abuse to identify those who have experienced trauma in their past. In integrated settings, there should be a sufficiently developed treatment pathway for patients who screen positively, requiring them to be seen by a behavioral health clinician. The clinician can then engage in a more global assessment that looks further into the history of trauma and explores the avenues for treatment. For children, symptom-based behavioral screening tools, such as the Pediatric Symptom Checklist, will indicate a need for behavioral health services and a broader assessment of current or past trauma in the child's life.

Outside of screening, many times patients who have histories of trauma come into contact with behavioral health providers by seeking therapeutic services for a seemingly unrelated problem in their life. Most of the time, patients are unaware that their past trauma may be causing them to have a disproportionately strong reaction to their current life difficulty. For example, a patient who is seeking behavioral health services because they are having a hard time at work, being criticized by their manager, and, perhaps, feels that the manager is "out to get them", may present with acute stress symptoms (nightmares, panic attacks, rumination, anxious mood, etc.). This reaction might seem out of proportion to the actual events occurring. Often times, with careful assessment, providers learn that a patient like this has had a history of trauma with authority figures. This mistreatment by authority figures when they were younger caused them to feel powerless and betrayed. The new experience with their boss has triggered the same reactions. They are re-living the familiar feelings of a lack of empathy from those who have power or authority over them.

SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT OF PTSD AND OTHER TRAUMA RELATED CONDITIONS:

At minimum, behavioral health clinicians need to be familiar with the DSM-V criteria for acute stress and post-acute stress disorders. Because trauma can manifest in a wide variety of symptoms, there are many different assessment tools for PTSD and related conditions that aim to identify whether the particular symptomology is related to trauma. Some of the screenings and assessments are self-administered, such as the PTSDS (Post Traumatic Stress Diagnostic Scale), while some are clinician -administered through structured interviews, such as the PTSD Symptom Scale Interview.

As with assessing and diagnosing other behavioral health conditions, self-administered assessment tools should never be used alone. Rather, they should always be used in conjunction with a clinical interview to ensure accurate diagnosis. This is because accurate assessment is based on self-disclosure and meaningful self-disclosure is based on the therapeutic alliance between the therapist and the patient (Screening and Assessment).

TREATMENT FOR PTSD AND RELATED TRAUMA CONDITIONS:

There are a number of therapeutic interventions that have proven to be effective for treating PTSD and other trauma related conditions, many of which are covered in this manual. Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Somatic Experiencing, Biofeedback, Seeking Safety, DBT, and CBT (especially with exposure therapy) are some of the well-researched treatments. With this, there are medications that have been shown to be helpful as well, both the SSRI family medications and anti-anxiety medications, though these are often only used on a short-term basis.

CRISIS INTERVENTION

Crisis intervention can be defined as the emergency psychological care provided to an individual who is in a crisis situation with the goal of restoring their emotional equilibrium as quickly as possible. Crisis intervention, by definition, is a temporary and immediate intervention, solely for the purpose of bringing an individual back to their normal level of functioning.

Crisis situations can range from encountering someone who is acutely suicidal or homicidal (or otherwise poses an immediate grave danger to themselves or others) to a patient who is disclosing some sort of child abuse (especially when the danger of immediate harm is high). A crisis situation could involve domestic violence (particularly when the perpetrator is in the building and the patient wants immediate assistance with leaving) or a situation where a patient is experiencing acute trauma symptoms, such as flooding, or a mental health crisis, such as disassociation.

How someone evaluates a crisis situation is the product of a complex combination of his or her external and internal circumstances. It involves their current environment, their state of mind, their individual history, skills, confidence, experience, training, beliefs, affective tolerance, and personality, and their appraisal of their environment given all of these factors. For example, a primary care provider may report a "crisis situation" after a patient reports "wanting to die", regardless of the actual clinical acuity. Likewise, a receptionist may call the behavioral health clinician after witnessing a patient talking to themselves in the waiting room, even if there are no apparent signs of danger.

Whatever the circumstance may be, because behavioral health providers are usually among the most skilled communicators in an organization or clinic, they are often called upon to intervene in crisis situations, apart from their normal patient care duties. While different organizations have different policies and protocols about a provider's involvement in these matters, behavioral health clinicians usually assume the role of the resident "expert" in de-escalation, mandated reporting, assessments of suicidality, and the like. For this reason, it is important for behavioral health clinicians to be well versed in the skills and techniques of crisis intervention.

FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR CRISIS INTERVENTION:

Self-managing your emotions, counter transference, and other reactions. The first task for a behavioral health clinician who is being called into a crisis situation is to manage their own feelings. Outcomes of intervention are dependent on the clinician's ability to successfully identify and manage their own feelings of fear, anger, anxiety or sometimes shame from childhood. It is important for the clinician to be well aware of their emotional triggers, or the situations and circumstances that bring up strong feelings in themselves. For example, a male patient who is yelling could trigger strong feelings of anger or fear, or a child first disclosing sexual abuse could trigger grief, anger, or shame. When clinicians are aware of their own personal histories and how they impact their reactions in different situations they can be more effective at managing their breathing, body language, and feelings during a crisis.

Rapidly assess the crisis situation for immediate safety concerns. Regardless of the type of crisis, a rapid assessment should be completed to evaluate everyone's immediate safety. In cases of mandated reporting, when the perpetrator has access to the victims, the assessment is both one of the danger of the perpetrator as well as the protective factors of the victim. For example, the access the perpetrator has to the victim, as well as how able the parent or guardian (or child, depending on age) is to provide protection. As with all assessments, accuracy is dependent on the information that is elicited, meaning, the information that is

gathered from the individual, their family, and any other staff involved - not judgments based on reactions to the situation.

Validate and affirm how the person is feeling. Validating and affirming the feelings of the person involved demonstrates empathy and provides a relational sense of stability that can help restore someone to their normal level of functioning and aid in the development of a strong therapeutic alliance, even in the midst of a crisis. Without proper validation and affirmation, many crises worsen, as the parties involved develop a greater sense of urgency to have their concerns heard. With this, validation and affirmation can take on many forms. For example, validating the concern of a primary care provider who is urgently paging a clinician to come assess a suicidal patient might involve saying something like, “This can seem pretty scary sometimes. It’s actually great that the patient felt they could tell you”. This will not only model the skills that you would hope the primary care provider would be using with their patients, but it will calm the provider down and prompt them to share more meaningful information about the situation. For example, the primary care provider might respond by saying “yeah, it is scary because she had just told me her brother killed himself and then she said she wants to die too”. Still, it is important to note that affirming and validating are not the same as agreeing or fulfilling requests and demands. For example, if a parent is demanding that the clinic drug test their teenager, the provider can validate affirm their concern in an empathetic way, but still follow the clinic’s protocol concerning this issue. In the end, validating and affirming are simply about purposefully and skillfully acknowledging how people feel and making sure they feel “seen” and “heard”.

Communicate with team members, including the patient’s family. Crisis intervention is a team sport. Whether the intervention is happening in an exam room or a waiting room, effective team communication is necessary in order to achieve successful outcomes. As soon as a clinician realizes that a crisis is at hand, they should take a moment to assess what sort of intervention is needed and communicate it to the team. This may involve stepping outside to let a receptionist know that they need to call the mobile crisis team or huddling with the primary care giver and nurse to make a quick decision about how to intervene on the first disclosure of sexual abuse by a patient. Clinicians should remember that the patient and their family members are part of the team, as well. It is important to make every effort to communicate with them as clearly and transparently as possible. This helps to increase trust and a sense of safety. For example, in the case of a first disclosure of sexual abuse, clinicians can, in addition to attending to the parent’s feelings, walk them through the next steps in reporting and answering any questions.

DE-ESCALATION

De-escalation refers to the skill set used to decrease a person's anger or agitation, especially when it is causing dangerous, abusive, or frightening behavior that could pose as a threat to them or someone else. De-escalation skills are developed over time, with very specific training and practice. It is important for organizations to have specific training curriculums for all staff about their specific policies, procedures, and protocols on incidents that require de-escalation. If organizations do not have standardized skills training for employees or do not have a response plan in place for when an employee has been mistreated by a visitor, the organization is at risk of modeling dysfunction, like that of a dysfunctional family, where abuse of its members is considered "normal" or is ignored completely. It is not uncommon for Behavioral Health Directors and/or clinicians to be the driving force behind developing these important policies and practices in an effort to drive an organization towards a healthier workplace culture, and for behavioral health clinicians to take on the majority of de-escalation incidents in an organization.

This document is not intended to be a replacement for training. This document aims to outline the basic organizational infrastructure needed to support safety, techniques for preventing situations in which patients become escalated, and a general overview of de-escalation skills.

INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT SAFETY:

While many organizations have used bullet proof glass, security guards, metal detectors and panic buttons in attempts to increase safety, few of these interventions have been shown to be effective. In fact, some of the research has shown that they can actually decrease safety and increase the likelihood that an already-irritable patient become escalated. Glass partitions in reception areas and metal detectors often decrease levels of trust and comfort in the organization's office and negatively affect patient experience ([Patient Experience](#)). Still, it is important for organizations to be thoughtful and proactive in planning for the safety of their staff and patients, as situations requiring de-escalation techniques inevitably occur. The following are general components of safety infrastructure that every healthcare organization should have in place.

1. A standardized customer service training program to consistently improve the quality of patient experience at the organization and accompanying quality improvement measures to track their effectiveness. A list of various customer service trainings and resources are included at the end of this document.
2. A standardized de-escalation training for all employees, no matter what their role is at the organization. Every employee from the receptionist to the CMO should be familiar with basic de-escalation techniques. Again, a list of resources for trainings is included at the end of this document.
3. An internal de-escalation "expert" at every site. Just as many organizations require a specific percentage of CPR trained staff to be at every site, organizations should also ensure a certain amount of de-escalation "experts" are at every site. These are people who have both natural skill in the area of de-escalation and formal training. These are also people who are willing to step in when needed.
4. Formal de-escalation policies, procedures, and practices at the organization.
5. Formal crisis reporting and de-briefing practices, including procedures for documenting all incidents in which patients have become escalated, a uniform way of tracking trends in incidents regularly, and a committee tasked with reviewing each incident within 24 hours and overall trends in escalations quarterly.

6. A protocol for de-briefing with staff involved in escalations to provide support and feedback
7. A protocol for following up with patients who may have witnessed an incident
8. A standardized procedure for handling patients who have become escalated in the office, including a protocol for following up with the patient within 24 hours, warning them of behavioral expectations and any possible dismissal criteria at the organization.

PREVENTING ESCALATION, EARLY INTERVENTION AND FULL DE-ESCALATION:

Some organizations have very few incidents of escalation while others have many. It is a common misunderstanding that this has to do with the patient population being served or events outside of our control—such as wait times or being discontinued from pain medications. However, serious escalations are almost always the result of patients feeling repeatedly ignored and/or disrespected. For this reason, the culture of communication and respect within an organization (between co-workers and employees-patients) is of paramount importance to the number of escalation incidents an organization will experience. In general, there are three stages of intervention that all incorporate these foundational concepts:

Prevention: The number of escalations at a given organization is in large part due to the culture of the organization, not to the patient population. Serious escalations are almost always the result of patients feeling repeatedly ignored or disrespected. Therefore, there are a number of evidenced-based strategies that can be employed by all members of the medical team and staff to lower the overall number of escalations in a given setting.

- Excellent customer service with all patients and at every level of contact. This involves eye contact, greeting the patient, and smiling within the first 5 seconds of a patient entering the facility and at every new point of entry (back office, exam room, etc.).
- “Repair” point of service infractions. This refers to acknowledging any trouble the patient may have experienced during their visit, such as having trouble finding parking and apologizing genuinely. If these small infractions are not repaired, they begin to compound. The next infraction, such as a longer than normal wait, will continue to cause the patients to escalate. Any staff member can repair an infraction at any point of service.
- Act with kindness, thoughtfulness, generosity, and warmth. No matter how small, any act that conveys empathy is an inoculation against escalation. This can be as simple as complimenting a patient, making small talk, offering their children crayons, or holding the door open for them.
- Even though the quality of interpersonal interactions is the most important factor in preventing escalations, the clinic environment, including the waiting room, exam rooms, and general facility should be kept clean and comfortable. This means making sure that there are no ripped chairs, chipped paint, old magazines, and that the temperature is appropriate. When the environment seems unkempt or uncared for, escalations increase.

Early Escalation Intervention: As soon as a patient or other visitor demonstrates any level of unhappiness, anger, irritability, or unrest, staff members can take action to prevent the situation from escalating any further. Some examples of a person experiencing unrest include them stating that they are unhappy, angry or irritated, them complaining of poor service or attributing mistakes (accurate or not) to the organization, them using a strained or raised tone of voice, them interrupting those who are speaking to them, them repeating themselves, and pacing, sighing loudly, rolling their eyes, or averting their gaze when staff is speaking to them.

- As soon as early signs of escalation are noticed, staff should huddle as team to decide on a plan and communicate who will approach.
- The person who is most skilled in de-escalation, usually the behavioral health clinician, should approach the patient and speak to them on their level. For example, if the patient is sitting, the clinician should find a chair close to them, sit down, and voice an empathetic inquiry, such as “Is there anything I can do for you?” In terms of positioning, “under-dogging” or getting slightly lower than the patient, is also typically very effective.
- Use reflective listening, empathetic body language, and validate and affirm the person's strengths. For example, you may reflect back “you've been here for two hours, I would feel the same way, it is so frustrating” and then validate and affirm by saying “ I appreciate your honesty and straightforwardness in telling me about your experience and I can see how much you care and worry about your son”. It can also be surprisingly effective to affirm when someone is actively working to manage his or her anger. For example, you might say “I just want to thank you so much for keeping your voice low. I appreciate you not yelling with the kids in the waiting room”.
- After you have gathered information from the patient and sufficiently validated their frustration, huddle with the team to decide on any further action needed to resolve the difficulty the patient is experiencing. This might involve moving the patient out of the waiting room to provide more comfort, offering water, or any other small offering that shows care. It is important to keep in mind that during de-escalation, it doesn't matter who is “right” and “wrong” or whether the patient “deserves” to be treated well or not. The only goal in de-escalation is de-escalation.

De-escalation Intervention: When a patient or other visitor is visibly escalated and displaying angry or aggressive behavior, such as arguing loudly, kicking or punching a wall, or swearing on a phone in the waiting room, there are some distinct strategies that can be employed to bring the person back to their base-emotional-level.

- Communicate what is going on to team members. This is paramount for safety. When a person becomes escalated, a supervisor or other staff member should inform all employees in the area that there is a disturbance in order to keep other patients and staff away. For example, if there is a disturbance at the front desk, medical assistants should not send patients who have just finished their visit back out to the front. Care should be taken to avoid flooding the scene with untrained staff or others who could potentially continue to escalate the individual. Research shows this communication with other employees and team members is the single largest indicator of the outcome of the attempt at de-escalation.
- Find the person who is most skilled in de-escalation and call them to the location. The difference between having an employee who is skilled in de-escalation techniques and one who is not makes a significant difference in the outcome of the situation. It does not matter whom the individual states they are angry at or why, the person who should respond to the situation should be the one who has the most skill in de-escalation techniques. Again, this is commonly the behavioral health provider, but when they are not available, there is usually another person at the organization who is naturally skilled in de-escalation.
- Control the environment and patient safety as much as possible. If you have asked the escalated individual to move to another location and they are unwilling to do so, it is important to ask the other patients in the area to leave. In this situation, whenever possible, direct the other patients where to go. For example, ask them to move to a back office or separate floor. It's uncommon for incidents

get to this level and it may seem scary to ask patients to move, but it is much more dangerous and frightening for patients to be close to a patient who is yelling and not have a staff member address their safety. Patients are, without fail, relieved and grateful to have been moved out of harm's way.

After the situation is resolved, it is important for supervisors and any other staff involved to properly document what has happened and carefully consider their actions going forward. If the individual who was acting out was a patient, the incident should also be documented in their chart. The behavioral health clinician or other qualified staff member should also address any patients who may have been witness to the event and ask if they would like to discuss their feelings about what happened. Depending on the severity of the situation, an open discussion in the waiting room might also be appropriate. For example, a clinician might say "Wow that must have been frightening to some of you. If there anyone who would like to speak more about this with a counselor, please let me or one of the other staff members know". Many times it is also important for an employee with excellent communication skills to call all of the patients who were witness to the incident a day or two later and ask how they are doing.

The staff should then begin the process of de-briefing. The majority of the de-briefing should be about learning in a non-judgmental atmosphere. It isn't important to find fault or assign blame, it is only important to learn from the incident. Normally, staff is able to identify things could have been done differently to prevent the incident from escalating or even happening at all. For example, they may identify that a staff member had a poor interaction with the patient on the phone before they arrived and argued with them about whether or not they had made an appointment. Then, perhaps when they arrived, the receptionist said, "sign in" or "take a seat" instead of providing an empathic, warm, greeting. Possibly, once the patient was yelling, a well-intentioned supervisor tried to intervene by repeatedly explaining the "sign in" policy to the patient, which just continued to increase their agitation. De-briefing all of the interactions and responses during the incident and discussing what could have been done differently can create a rich learning lab for employees. With this, it is important to elicit and attend to the employees' feelings. Encourage them to identify how they felt and what their experience of the incident was.

Lastly, make a decision about how to address the patient's inappropriate behavior going forward. Some organizations may choose to do this with a formal meeting, in order to come to a consensus about how to approach the patient's behavior. Other times, this may happen with a more informal "check in". But, at the very least, there should always be a discussion with the patient about their actions. If the situation was severe enough, it might also warrant discharge from the organization, although this is typically a last resort, reserved for when patients have threatened staff or repeatedly abused staff, even after warning and intervention. Whatever decision is reached should be documented in the patient's chart. Normally a person (often a behavioral health clinician) is chosen to communicate the decision to the patient and skillfully let them know that they have crossed a boundary. They empathically let them know what will happen if these limits are crossed again (hopefully the organization has set policies about this), yet at the same time, can apologize for any mistreatment the patient feels they may have been the recipient of. If the patient is currently receiving behavioral health treatment at the organization, when the next session or opportunity presents itself, the behavioral health clinician should also discuss what happened with the patient. This is a clinical opportunity to examine the impact of the patient's outburst or disruptive behavior and any triggers that may have caused the event to occur. If the patient is not currently receiving behavioral health services, it might be a good opportunity to offer or encourage a visit with the behavioral health clinician as a way to process the incident. This not only conveys that the organization cares about the patient but it also shows that that they care about working with them.

MORE GENERAL TIPS FOR DE-ESCALATION:

1. Always remember the number one goal when someone is very escalated (yelling, threatening, swearing, kicking chairs, etc.) is to avoid anyone being injured. The second goal is to minimize the situation's impact on others who may be frightened (patients, other staff). So...
2. This means "explaining", "defending", "being right" or "drawing boundaries" are NOT goals in these situations. This can ALL be done later. Forget all of these things. The ONLY goal is to have the escalated person leave the building with as little impact as possible. This means...
3. Do not explain why they shouldn't be mad, why what they are saying isn't accurate, or why it isn't the organization's fault that they can't get the patient what they want. Remember that those who are escalated have brains that are flooded with adrenalin and this means their cognition is impaired. It is not the time for reason or logic.
4. Agree, agree, agree, validate, validate, validate. See below...
5. Don't listen too closely to what they are saying. This probably sounds odd since when patients are unhappy with us or have "normal" anger, we usually do listen closely to what they are saying so that we can reflect back what we have heard and help solve a problem. However when someone is very escalated, the content of what he or she is saying is not the primary issue. Moreover, when we listen to closely we can be tempted to "explain" something to them so they won't be angry. This is a typically reaction, but it will make things worse.
6. Utilize reflective listening to summarize and reflect what you have heard, especially feelings. Remember that trying to "fix" what they are mad about will only anger them more if their feelings are not acknowledged first.
7. The immediate task is to get the patient AWAY from everyone else. This is in an effort to lower the situation's impact on other patients and staff, who can be very frightened by angry people. It is also easier to de-escalate someone when there is not an audience watching. Think immediately about the environment. First question to yourself and your team should be, "How can I get this person away from everyone else?"
8. Introduce yourself to the patient. Let them know that you will be the one to help them and that you want them to tell you all of the things that they are unhappy about. This is a specific technique that is used to have patients utilize a different part of their brain, which helps reduce anger and become more stable. You want them to have to THINK with their pre frontal cortex. So, as an example, you might say "Hi! I am Martha Overton. I am going to help you today. I need you to tell me all of the things that happened, from the beginning".
9. If the patient is very angry, but has not threatened verbally or non-verbally, ask them to come into an office to talk privately. Frame this offer as a benefit to the patient by saying something like, "I will be able to help you better if we are alone".
10. If the patient feels unpredictable or uncomfortable with being in an office, ask them to step outside the clinic to talk with you. Again, frame this as a benefit to the patient by saying something like, "We will have more privacy outside", or appeal to their caring side by saying something like "I think it might be a good idea in the case that the kids here get scared".

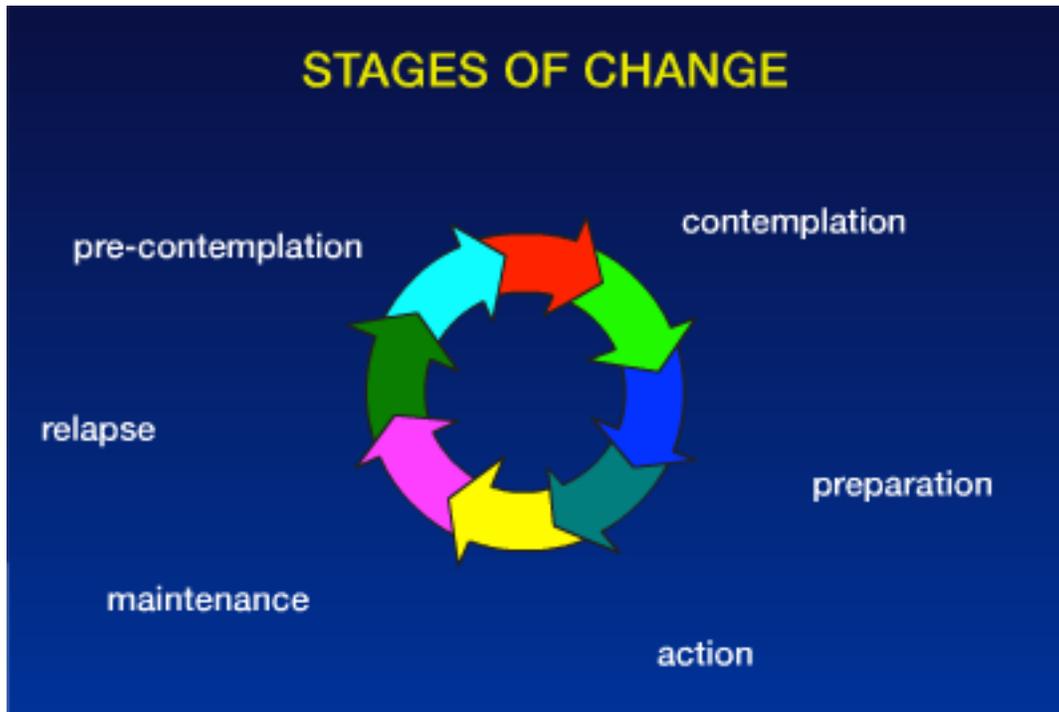
11. If the patient appears to be under the influence of a substance, recognize that their ability to rationally reason and regulate their emotions decreases and their impulsivity levels may increase. Even if you feel that you know the patient well, the substances will interfere with their ability to respond to traditional de-escalation techniques effectively. Depending on the level of their impairment, it can be helpful to talk to the patient alone, away from other patients, to let them know treatment services won't be helpful to them while they are impaired and suggest rescheduling the appointment, or if that isn't what brought them in, ask them to come back later.
12. If any escalated patient verbally or physically indicates threats harm themselves or others, communicate with your team to call the police while you stay at a distance to talk with them.
13. If the patient will not move, remove everyone else from around them. For example, if the patient will not leave the waiting room when you ask them to follow you, then have all other patients in the waiting room led into the back office, break room, or other area instead. Make sure a staff member sits with the other patients to help them with feelings.
14. Avoid being the one to interact with an escalated patient if you tend to get angry, defensive, or very frightened when you are around angry people. Also avoid interacting with an escalated patient if you have had a very negative interaction with them before. You are less likely to be able to manage your own emotions and they will be less motivated to find any common ground (we are all human).
15. Consider who on the team historically has the best rapport with the escalated patient. This is likely the best person to engage the escalated patient, if possible.
16. Never interact with an escalated patient who specifically asks not to deal with you.
17. It is a myth that if patients vent enough, they will "wear" out and feel better. If a patient is raging, yelling, arguing, and despite getting them alone, empathizing, reflectively listening, validating, their anger continues to escalate, it is important to indicate that the conversation has to end. To do this, you might say something like, "I am so sorry, I wish I could fix this, you've had a terrible experience here. I don't know that we are going to be able to do anything at this time and unfortunately I am going to have to go."
18. As related to the above, if a patient is demanding something that we would not normally give to them, it is imperative that we do not give it to them now in hopes that this will resolve their anger.
19. One definition of a "successful resolution" in de-escalation can be a patient leaving. This means that their feelings do not necessarily have to be resolved. If a patient leaves, with minimal impact on others, this is an acceptable ending.
20. Never follow a patient who leaves the office or facility in anger. For some employees or clinicians, it is hard to let someone leave angry and there is a temptation to follow, especially if we feel they may be a danger to themselves or others. However, if a patient leaves angry, they are self-managing their anger BY leaving, and it is important we do not pursue. If they have said something that indicates that they are a threat to themselves or others, we can call emergency services after the patient leaves.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR CUSTOMER SERVICES, PATIENT EXPERIENCE AND DE-ESCALATION WORKSHOPS AND TRAININGS:

- The Empathy Effect: Mitigating Bias to Improve Healthcare Outcomes- The Institute for Healthcare Communication www.healthcarecomm.org
- Treating Patients with CARE- The Institute for Healthcare Communication www.healthcarecomm.org
- Language of Caring for Staff and Providers – Language of Caring, www.languageofcaring.com
- Difficult Clinician-Patient Relationships: The Institute for Healthcare Communication www.healthcarecomm.org
- Nonviolent Crisis Intervention: Crisis Prevention Institute- www.crisisprevention.com

MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Motivational Interviewing (MI) refers to the therapeutic approach developed by psychologists William Miller and Stephen Rollnick in 1983. They defined Motivational Interviewing as “a collaborative, person-centered form of guiding to elicit and strengthen motivation for change”. It is based on the trans-theoretical conceptual model of the stages of change and affirms that change is not a straight line, but instead a circular progression.



Motivational Interviewing was originally created for use in treatment of those with addictive disorders, but is now used in a wide variety of settings. Since its main goal is to elicit behavior change it has proven to be successful for weight management, medication adherence, exercise, smoking cessation, mental health conditions, and chronic diseases. Motivational Interviewing has also been heavily researched, making it an evidenced-based practice for many years. A large Meta-analysis from 2005 (MARMITE) has also demonstrated strong evidence for its effectiveness in treatment, retention, and adherence. More information on the MARMITE study can be found in the [Resources for Further Exploration](#) section.

In specifically considering the application of Motivational Interviewing as a therapeutic intervention, it is important to note that it is highly collaborative and person centered. It is characterized by the clinician's skilled empathy conveyance, lack of judgment, and related acceptance of the patient's decisions. The therapist elicits, respects, and prioritizes the patient's beliefs, perceptions, preferences, and reinforces the patient's autonomy and choice.

FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES OF MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING:

Ask open-ended questions. Open-ended questions elicit what is important to the patient, what their beliefs are, what they think would be helpful to them, and what they have tried before in regards to changing their behavior. In contrast with close-ended questions, which tend to force a patient into a particular answer, open-ended questions call the patient to explore and reflect on their cognitions and behavior. In considering Motivational Interviewing specifically, open-ended questions serve three main purposes. They increase the

amount of accurate and meaningful information shared in sessions, increase a patient's engagement in therapy, and increase a patient's activation to change their behavior.

Affirm the patient's strengths, values, aspirations, and positive qualities. Clinicians should actively look and listen for the patient's strengths, values, aspirations, and positive qualities and reflect them back to the patient in an affirming manner. For example, if a patient states that they are afraid because they are "always angry and yelling at their children" and they worry that this may hurt their relationship with them, the therapist might tell the patient that this actually indicates that they really value their relationship with their children, which is a great quality to have, instead of just focusing on fixing the anger and yelling.

Reflectively listen. Instead of relying solely on asking questions, in Motivational Interviewing the therapist typically responds to patients with reflective statements that encourage or guide the patient to continue talking. For example, a therapist might reflect, "it was so frustrating for you to relapse again". This encourages the patient to continue talking about the relapse. Reflective listening should use exact words. Research indicates that patients feel more listened to when their therapist uses a few of their exact words, along with other simple non-judgmental statements or more complex reflections about the underlying meaning or feelings that a patient expressed. By doing this, the therapist is in a sense "checking" to make sure they are following the patient, hearing them, and understanding them correctly. Reflective listening allows the patient to turn their focus internally on themselves and to reflect on their own strengths and resources, as opposed to listening to the therapist's expertise or reactions.

Elicit "change talk". This refers to the therapist eliciting self-motivational statements from the patient, instead of just giving motivational statements to the patient. For example, the clinician may ask, "What are your hopes for your pregnancy?" as opposed to "Now that you're pregnant, it is important to quit smoking". Eliciting "change talk" frequently happens in response to a patient's statement. For example, if a patient says "I am not interested in quitting. I only smoke 6 cigarettes a day anyways", the therapist might respond by saying "Tell me more about the decision to only smoke 6". This elicits change talk by implying the patient's motivation is to keep their nicotine use low. Moreover, as Rollnick and Miller said, patients talk themselves into and out of change!

Resolve ambivalence. Ambivalence is normal - all people have mixed feelings about changing their behavior. Working to resolve ambivalence helps the patient move forward into actively changing their behavior. To do this, a clinician may help the patient identify the pros and cons of their behavior change and reflect both sides of ambivalence back to them in order to help them obtain clarity on their own internal conflict about change.

Skillfully convey empathy. Practitioners should always make a genuine effort to understand the patient's perspective and convey that understanding to the patient. As Carl Rogers said in 1962 "When the patient's world is clear to the counselor... [the counselor] can also voice meanings in the patient's experience of which the patient is scarcely aware..." He referred to this "highly sensitive" empathy on the part of the therapist as instrumental to getting a patient closer to him or herself. It allows them to learn, change, and develop. A plethora of research demonstrates that behavior change only happens in the context of patient feeling empathy from the helper and that insufficient empathy can cause patients to engage in more problematic behavior patterns.

Develop discrepancy. This is the act of listening for or employing strategies that facilitate the patient's identification of discrepancies between a particular behavior or situation, and their goals and/or values. For example, reflecting back to the patient that they really value the relationship with their children (affirming) and that they disclosed that they spend little time with them in part due to their alcohol use (reflective listening) and then helping them to examine the discrepancies between their values and current behavior.

Roll with resistance. Avoid argumentation, in any form and at all costs, but try to elicit “resistance talk”. Argumentation involves disagreeing with a patient’s appraisal or responding to a statement with conflicting information in order to “prove” them wrong. However, “rolling with resistance” refers to the therapist’s ability to recognize resistance and instead, use techniques such as empathy conveyance, affirmation, and reflective listening to elicit change. Still, a clinician may try more direct ways of eliciting “resistance talk” or “sustaining talk” (such as talking about the benefits of continuing their current behavior, reasons why it isn’t possible or desirable to change, etc.) by explicitly asking patients to identify benefits of their continued substance use, or other behavior and/or how their problematic behavior is helpful to them.

CRITICISMS AND CAUTIONS OF MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING:

The criticisms and cautions of Motivational Interviewing are minimal. However, it is important to note that Motivational Interviewing has been heavily manualized and acronym-ized, by different organizations for different purposes. These training tools sometimes over simplify motivational interviewing and under estimate the amount of practice and skill it takes to become an effective MI practitioner. In addition, sometimes Motivational Interviewing is talked about or taught in a way that is not consistent with the spirit of the technique, focusing more on “tricks” (handing them a page with goals to check off which ones they will do, for example) to get people to change than true empathic collaboration with patients.

COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

“... Nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” - Shakespeare's Hamlet

Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) is a type of psychotherapeutic treatment that rests on the principle that although we may not be able to change events, people, the past, the future, or even ourselves sometimes, we can change our appraisal or thinking about these things, and thus, impact our feelings and subsequent behavior. CBT first began to develop in the 1950s, with the work and writing of Albert Ellis. His early version of CBT was called Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) and was borne out of Ellis' frustration with traditional psychoanalytic techniques, which he saw as largely indirect and ineffective. In the last decade, CBT has become increasingly popular and research has shown that it is equally, if not more, effective than medication in treating everything from depression to chronic pain. In fact, it has been used to treat a wide range of disorders including phobias, addictions, depression, and anxiety as well as general low self-esteem, stress, resentments, complicated grief or other conditions involving faulty cognitive patterns.

It should be noted that while CBT is incredibly well researched and demonstrates very good effectiveness, this might be due to the ease of studying CBT, as it is usually focused on specific behavioral outcomes.

FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES OF COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR THERAPY:

Collaboration, genuineness, and the therapeutic alliance. As in previous sections of this manual, the therapeutic alliance is the foundational principle in which other techniques can be used. This must be successfully established and maintained in order for other interventions succeed. Read more on this subject in The Therapeutic Alliance.

Elicit information from the patient about their beliefs and what they think will be helpful to them. In CBT one of the first steps is assessing whether the patient actually thinks their thinking patterns are problematic. For example, many patients who have General Anxiety Disorder (GAD), or sub-threshold diagnosis, worry so much that it impairs their social, emotional, functioning and their overall health but do not believe that the worrying itself is causing the problems. They might believe that their worrying is actually a protective factor or that it helps them “prepare” for something else that is coming. Because of this, they think that they “need” to worry. While CBT would likely be helpful for this patient, it would be useless unless the patient had a sense that their worrying, or their thinking patterns, was problematic. Many times, clinicians will need to use motivational interviewing or a similar technique to help patients come to a better understanding of their cognitions and elicit motivation to change them, before employing CBT.

Assess cognitive distortions. This is sometimes known as the “functional analysis” and helps the patient learn how their thoughts, feelings, and situations contribute to maladaptive behaviors. It is important for the clinician to elicit insights from patients about their own thoughts and thought patterns. This is highly collaborative and involves the therapist guiding the patient to examine their thinking and identify their most common thinking errors.

Elicit “cognitive correctives”. This involves the therapist asking the patient what might have been a better or more helpful thought to replace their faulty thought. As with all interventions, it is best for the patient to come up with their “cognitive correctives” on their own. However, if the therapist finds that the patient is struggling to do this, they may provide some CBT text or handout that gives some examples.

Set goals for new thoughts and behaviors. The therapist should work to elicit information from patient about what they would like to practice outside of the therapy. It is important to remember that the therapist should

be careful not to give advice or suggestions about this, as patients who set their own goals are much more likely to succeed at them. However, the therapist can “whittle down” goals to make them appropriately achievable, as patients will often set goals that are too high. Breaking them into steps can be a good way to improve the likelihood of successful outcomes and give the patient something that they feel highly confident they can achieve.

CRITICISMS AND CAUTIONS OF COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR THERAPY:

Cognitive behavior therapy involves “meta-thinking” or “thinking about thinking”. The great majority of patients, including children and even those with psychosis, have this ability to do this, although it usually takes a bit of practice. There are some patients however who do not have the capacity to reflect on patterns in their thinking. For these patients, CBT would not be appropriate.

A rigid or strict focus on discerning problematic thinking, without collaboration, sufficient therapeutic alliance or accurate empathy, can lead therapists to engage in a pattern of combatting a patient’s thoughts/feelings with logical arguments, which is not effective therapy. Sometimes focusing exclusively on “cognitive correctives” without sufficient focus on the patient’s goals can frustrate patients, as knowledge does not always translate directly into behavior change. Many patients “know” what they are thinking is inaccurate, however are still unable to change their behavior.

DIALECTICAL BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) is a modified form of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) that was developed by Dr. Marsha Linehan at the University of Washington in the late 1980's for treating those with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and chronically suicidal or other self-harm behaviors. Although there is limited research about its effectiveness for treating other conditions, DBT has also been used to treat mood disorders, substance abuse disorders, and even those with traumatic brain injuries.

DBT was founded on the principles of increasing mindfulness, interpersonal effectiveness and emotional regulation and tolerance, through a combination of individual and group therapy sessions. Because patients are expected to attend weekly individual sessions and weekly group therapy sessions, DBT is considered to be somewhat time intensive, taking about a year of commitment from the patient in order to show substantial progress.

FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR DIALECTICAL BEHAVIORAL THERAPY:

Develop and maintain a successful therapeutic alliance. While a strong therapeutic alliance is the foundation any effective therapeutic interventions, it is specifically important in DBT. Patients with BPD and/or chronically suicidal behaviors are thought to have histories of poor attachment to their primary care givers, which results in maladaptive relational patterns that disrupt therapy's effectiveness. Because of this, the therapeutic alliance in DBT needs to be consistently attended to. The patients must see their therapist as an "ally" who provides a climate of unconditional acceptance. This can be particularly complex as the therapist must concurrently establish and maintain clear boundaries in order to prevent the patient from repeating self-defeating interpersonal patterns in their therapeutic relationship. Therapists should consider inviting discussions about this early on in the therapeutic relationship. They should discuss what the patient might do if the therapist is not available when the patient feels an urgent need to see/talk to the therapist, how phone calls will be handled, and other situations where the patient's perceived need is more than what the organization's or therapist's capacity allows. Maintaining the therapeutic relationship while identifying limits and boundaries takes specific skills, but typically, therapists grow in their abilities to do this over time and with experience. New therapists, and even experienced ones, often utilize colleagues and supervisors for consultation and support when establishing and maintaining boundaries during treatment with patients who have personality disorder characteristics.

Teach and model mindfulness. Teaching mindfulness is considered to be the foundational skill of DBT. Mindfulness is defined as "the practice of cultivating awareness and paying attention to the present moment without judgment or fear". It is based on the idea that strong emotions only exist fleetingly in the present. By cultivating the ability to stay in the present and focus on these emotions, the patient is able to build affective tolerance and develop the ability to tolerate uncomfortable emotions without self-harm (or harm to others). Perhaps more than any other skill, the therapist should be also be personally well versed in mindfulness. This better prepares the clinician to teach the skill effectively and elicit motivation in their patients to learn the skill as a way of facilitating growth and development in the future.

Teach and model interpersonal effectiveness. Therapists should work to elicit motivation from their patients to increase their interpersonal skills and encourage them to model the newly learned skills in sessions. The content of interpersonal skill training is focused on building effective communication techniques that increase one's level of assertiveness and neutralizing interpersonal conflict. Enhancing a patient's level of assertiveness helps them learn to ask for what they need or want without damaging their relationships.

Teach distress tolerance. This refers to eliciting motivation from the patient to increase their distress tolerance. Distress tolerance training helps patients to accept, tolerate, and deal with stressful situations without reacting

in maladaptive ways, such as harming relationships or themselves. Distress tolerance training often times involves mindfulness, breathing, centering, and other physically oriented techniques.

Teach and model emotional regulation. Emotional regulation training is related to, but also distinct from, distress tolerance training. Emotional regulation training is rooted in cognitive techniques, such as reflection, analysis, and future planning. It helps the patient to deal with negative emotions, increases their awareness of their present state of mind, and thereby gives them the skills to better tolerate unpleasant or scary emotions while increasing positive emotions. With this, the therapist works to elicit motivation from the patient to increase their emotional regulation and model these skills in sessions. By modeling the skills in session, the patient becomes more comfortable with using them and develops the ability to take them into relationships outside of therapy.

SEEKING SAFETY

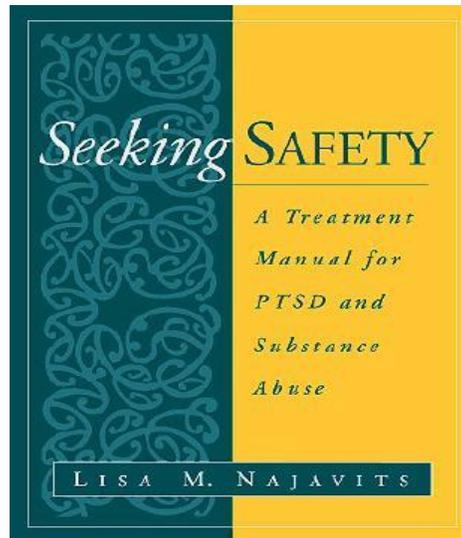
Seeking Safety is an evidenced-based counseling model used to help patients who have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and/or a substance abuse condition. It was developed in 1992 by Lisa M. Najavits, PhD at Harvard Medical School in response to research indicating that nearly 60% of those who had an addictive disorder also had PTSD.

Although Seeking Safety was originally developed to treat patients who concurrently experienced PTSD and a substance abuse disorder, today, it is considered to be a highly flexible therapeutic model. Patients do not necessarily have to meet formal criteria for PTSD or substance abuse to partake in the therapy and it is used with both individuals and groups. Moreover, it has proven to be successfully implemented across many different patient populations, including adolescents, homeless individuals, those involved in the criminal justice system, those affected by domestic violence, those with severe mental illness, veterans and military personnel, as well as people of many different ethnicities. More generally, Seeking Safety is used as a model to teach coping skills and is considered to be very "safe", as it can even be used by clinicians who lack formal training.

Seeking Safety is present-focused and does not ask the patient to specifically share about their past trauma. It focuses on coping skills and psycho-education to empower patients by giving them practical tools to use in their daily lives. Seeking Safety uses five key principles:

1. Safety is the overarching goal (helping patients attain safety in their relationships, thinking, behavior, and emotions)
2. Integrated treatment (working on both PTSD and substance abuse issues at the same time)
3. A focus on ideals to counteracting the loss of ideals in both PTSD and substance abuse
4. Work in four content areas: cognitive, behavioral, interpersonal, and case management
5. Attention to the clinician's processes (helping clinicians work on counter-transference, self-care, and other issues)

Seeking Safety offers 25 topics that can be addressed: Introduction/Case Management, Safety, PTSD: Taking Back Your Power, When Substances Control You, Honesty, Asking for Help, Setting Boundaries in Relationships, Getting Others to Support Your Recovery, Healthy Relationships, Community Resources, Compassion, Creating Meaning, Discovery, Integrating the Split Self, Recovery Thinking, Taking Good Care of Yourself, Commitment, Respecting Your Time, Coping with Triggers, Self-Nurturing, Red and Green Flags, Detaching from Emotional Pain (Grounding), Life Choices, and Termination.



These can be addressed in any order and include as few or many as time allows and are outlined extensively in the Seeking Safety manual (purchased at <http://www.treatment-innovations.org/about-us.html>). The manual also includes materials, handouts, and other tools for the therapist.

FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES OF SEEKING SAFETY:

The therapeutic alliance. As in previous sections of this manual, the therapeutic alliance is the foundation for a clinician using the Seeking Safety model ([Establishing an Effective Therapeutic Alliance](#)).

Provide psycho-educational information. Providing psycho-educational information during therapy is necessary for the patient to begin considering their thoughts, behaviors, and environment. However, there is an important difference between providing information and giving advice. Giving advice should always be diligently avoided. Instead, use the "Ask, Ask, Tell, Ask" (AATA) technique - Ask what the patient already knows about the subject, ask for permission to give them any missing or corrective information, tell them the information using third person pronouns, and ask the patient what their thoughts are on that information. As a general rule of thumb, patients should always talk more than the therapist, both in psycho-educational groups and individual sessions.

Self-reflection and insight. The ability to identify counter-transference and more generally, to self-reflect, without judgment, on one's own history and discern how it impacts one's therapeutic work, is imperative for any therapist. It is also a key a principle of the Seeking Safety model. More broadly, self-care and wellness are largely dependent on a therapist's ability to self-assess. For more information on self-reflection and insight see the [Clinician Support](#) section.

CRITICISMS AND CAUTIONS OF SEEKING SAFETY:

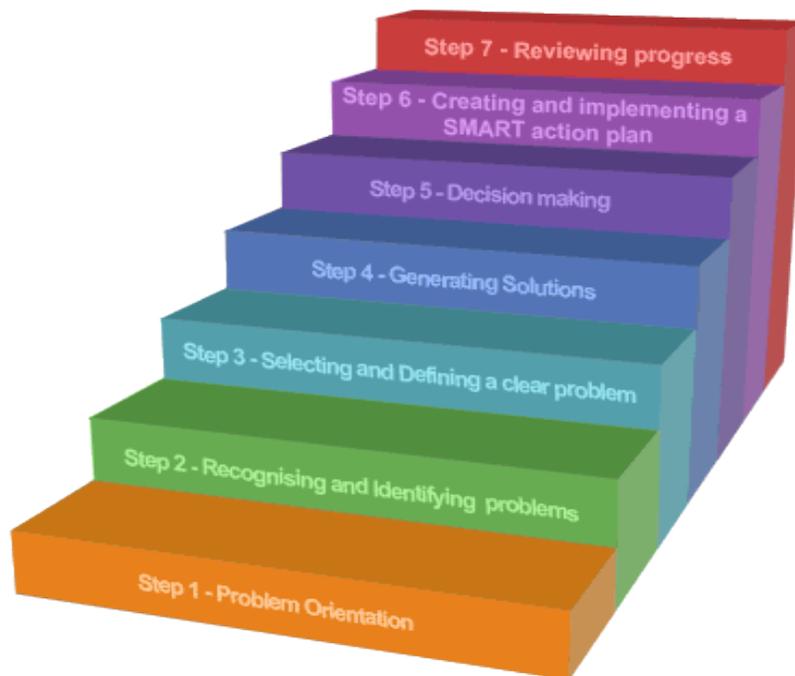
Seeking Safety is considered to have a few noteworthy limitations. It may not be helpful for patients who have a strong inclination to focus on and talk about the specifics of their traumatic history in therapy. There is also some research to show that patients who have difficulty with choosing one of the 25 topics may not achieve the same level of symptoms resolution as those who are able to choose. However, as with all therapeutic interventions, symptom remission is correlated with the number of sessions a patient has.

PROBLEM SOLVING THERAPY

Problem Solving Therapy (PST) is a brief focused therapeutic treatment used to intervene on those who have engaged in self-harm and presented in the emergency room. It was initially developed in New Zealand by Thomas D'Zurilla and Marvin Godfried in 1971 in response their to observations of patients who had depressive symptoms and were at higher risk of suicide. They found that these patients had patterns of negative cognitions about the problems in their lives and their ability to solve them. The patients saw their problems as a threats to their wellbeing, blamed themselves for what they were experiencing, and lacked the self-confidence to attempt to solve them effectively. Patients with these thinking patterns tended to see their problems as unsolvable and either avoided them completely or put the responsibility on others to solve the problems for them.

Problem Solving Therapy is a collaborative approach to assist patients with effectively solving the life problems they are experiencing. It aims to address the patient's negative cognitive patterns, much like CBT, and build their problem solving skills. The behavioral health clinician may focus the intervention on one particular problem, but the problem solving skills learned through PST can be applied to other problems the patient may have currently or in the future. Specific interventions include psycho-education, interactive problem-solving exercises, and motivational homework assignments.

There are 7 steps in PST as shown in the graphic below.



Beyond its use for treating depressive disorders and suicidal ideation, PST has been shown to be effective for a wide range of behavioral health issues, including anxiety, relationship difficulties, certain personality disorders, and emotional distress related to medical difficulties. For more information on how to become a certified PST practitioner, go to http://www.impact-uw.org/training/problem_solving.html. With this, for more information about how PST is used in the IMPACT model, take a look at a PST manual that was developed by Mark Hegel, PhD and Patricia Areán, PhD for the IMPACT study (http://www.impact-uw.org/files/PST-PC_Manual.pdf)

BEHAVIORAL ACTIVATION

Behavioral Activation (BA) is considered to be a component of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) but can also be used as a stand-alone intervention. The theory holds that insufficient environmental reinforcement or too much environmental punishment contributes to depression and other behavioral health conditions. The goal of Behavioral Activation, therefore, is to increase one's environmental reinforcement. While most cognitive therapies focus on changing thinking patterns as the way to change behaviors and affective states, BA focuses on changing behaviors as the way to change thinking and affective states. BA has been shown to be effective with those experiencing both depressive and anxiety states and symptoms.

The BA model proposes that life events, such as trauma or loss, biological predispositions to depression, or the daily hassles of life, lead to an individual's experience of low levels of positive reinforcement. When patients feel sad and no longer find pleasure in things they used to, they tend to decrease their activity levels, avoiding social and occupational activity, as well as other pleasure producing actions. They "shut down" and may choose to cope by oversleeping, overeating, using nicotine, alcohol or drugs, which reduce the severity of the difficult feelings in the short-term but actually increase depressive symptoms and compound their problems in the long-term.

Therefore, BA seeks to intervene in this cycle through behavior changes that work from the "outside in". Therapists help patients to set behavior goals and schedule activities in order to facilitate positive reinforcement. BA specifically addresses avoidance and inertia through structured sessions that include assignments and outside of session tasks. An example of this type of assignment might be a worksheet where patients list 3 activities they used to enjoy and 3 responsibilities they need to take care of. The patient sets a small, manageable, goal of engaging in one of each of the activities before the next therapy session and then scales or rates their depression, pleasant feelings, and sense of achievement before and after doing each of the activities. BA typically takes place over several sessions and progressively ranks activities according to their level of difficulty. Therapists assist patients in moving up the ladder as they experience success with the easier, lower ranked, behaviors and eventually build the confidence to achieve success with the higher ranked, more difficult, activities.

CRITICISMS AND CAUTIONS OF BEHAVIORAL ACTIVATION:

One caution with using BA, as with all therapy techniques, is that when insufficient attention is paid to the therapeutic alliance, the therapy will likely be ineffective. BA is most appropriate for patients who have a belief system that supports the intervention. With this, therapists should be careful to not be overly directive with BA. Although therapist should guide patients towards setting goals that aren't too high (like a walk every day for 15 minutes for someone who spends the majority of their days in the bedroom) or too low, therapist should also try to elicit goals from patients and avoid telling them what actions the "must" take to "get better". As stated above, therapists can do this by guiding patients gradually towards more "difficult" goals, as setting goals that are too high sets patients up for failure and will likely reinforce a familiar cycle of failure.

CLINICIAN SUPPORT

CLINICIAN SELF CARE AND WELL-BEING

Therapists have a special responsibility to tend to their own well-being because the “tool” that they use in their profession is themselves. How they are doing personally has a direct impact on their professional skills and subsequently the quality of care that patients receive. However, being perfectly well physically, spiritually, and emotionally is not only impossible, it is undesirable. Personal growth and learning are only experienced during times of difficulty. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the therapist to develop the ability to recognize the early signs of difficulty, self-assess how they are doing personally and professionally, and surround themselves with supportive people in their personal and professional lives who can help them work through their struggle. This allows the therapist to continually enhance their own health and wellness while simultaneously developing the varied repertoire of coping and thriving strategies that is necessary for professional life as a therapist.

COMMON CLINICIAN DIFFICULTIES:

Burn Out: Clinician burn out, sometimes called or related to “compassion fatigue”, is the “imbalance between the psychological resources of an individual and the demands being made on those resources”. It is common among all of the “helping” professions and usually builds incrementally over time. Some signs that a clinician might be experiencing burnout are:

- The feeling of dragging oneself into work most days
- Repeating the same interpretations or other “scripts” over and over
- A reliance on giving advice rather than helping patient’s grow
- Beginning sessions late and/or ending them early
- Spacing out frequently during sessions
- A decline in empathy and increase in judgment
- The tendency to push personal theories, techniques, or agendas rigidly
- A decline in the quality of listening
- A lack of excitement for learning new things related to the field.
- Self-disclosures without judging their usefulness to patients

Vicarious Traumatization: Vicarious Traumatization, sometimes called “Secondary Traumatic Stress” or “Secondary Victimization” is “the emotional residue that a counselor experiences after hearing people speak about their traumatic stories”. It is the process of vicariously becoming “witnesses to the pain, fear, and terror that trauma survivors have endured”. Therapists working in most settings hear a high percentage of trauma disclosures and integrated settings are no exception. Some signs that a clinician might be experiencing Vicarious Traumatization are:

- Irritability

- Exaggerated startle response
- Over-eating or under-eating
- Difficulty falling asleep and/or staying asleep
- Losing sleep thinking about patients
- Diminished joy toward things they once enjoyed
- Feeling trapped by their work
- Intrusive images of patient trauma disclosures
- Feelings of hopelessness associated with work and patients
- Rumination about a patient's traumatic events
- Dreaming about patients, especially their trauma experiences

PREVENTATIVE AND EARLY INTERVENTION SELF CARE STRATEGIES:

It should be noted that, historically, self-care was not seen as being important to the medical field. Until recently, it was not common for professionals and researchers to write about it, study it, or discuss it openly. For this reason, behavioral health professionals are usually the first ones to advocate for and model the importance of self-care in a given organization. Below are a few strategies behavioral health clinicians can adopt in regards to enhancing self-care.

Setting Boundaries: Early in their careers, therapists often become aware of the importance of setting boundaries and how it relates to their own wellbeing. Boundaries around office space, session times with patients, limiting “add-ons” or “crunching in” patients when there is no appointment time, and restricting work at night and on weekends (including EHR work) are some examples. There are no “right” limits or boundaries to set. Each therapist must personally decide what limits they need to have in place in order to protect their own energy and well-being.

Utilizing Professional Support: Prioritizing and utilizing clinical supervision both formally and informally allows therapists to have a forum for openly discussing the difficult issues that come up in their professional life. Ideally, these forums are safe, open, spaces that encourage the therapist to self-disclose without fear of judgment. Continuing education courses and books that directly address clinician wellbeing can also be very helpful. The Greater Good Science Center researches and writes about self-compassion and compassion fatigue for helping professionals and often offers continuing education on this topic. For more information, see their website, <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu>.

Utilizing Personal Support: Although therapy is required in only a small number of graduate programs, research indicates a high percentage of behavioral health professionals have engaged in therapy themselves. There are many reasons this can be helpful. It increases empathy for what it is like to be a patient, it gives a personal, on-the-ground, look at what works and what doesn't, and it helps in lowering stress and treating other conditions a therapist might suffer from, such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. In addition, many therapists have grown from a caretaking role in their families, into a caretaking profession, and sometimes a caretaking role in their organization. Alice Miller, author of *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, and others believe that therapists who come from this childhood role are bound to need to confront their inability to “fix” others

and care for everyone at some point in their career. Therapy can provide the valuable insight and support needed to overcome this. Employee insurance plans usually cover therapy services, while many organizations also have Employee Assistance Programs in place that allow for personnel to access therapy services.

Utilizing Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual Well-being Practices: While therapists often refer to these things as a matter of course when they are working with patients, they often forget that they are important for themselves as well. Daily exercise, plenty of sleep, healthy eating, time with friends, time spent in hobbies and other interests or activities one is passionate about are foundational to wellbeing. Engaging in spiritual practices, participating in spiritual communities, and maintaining healthy relationships that are marked by love, affection and open communication are pillars of self-care for most helping professionals. All of these things are easier said than done and it is natural for most helping professionals to struggle with any number of these life components, however, they are nonetheless important to incorporate into one's self-care routine.

Balancing Personal and Professional Life: There are many factors that influence how one chooses to balance their time spent working and not working. Some professionals may be most influenced by the specific messages, modeling, and beliefs that they received from their family of origin. Others may hold onto the beliefs and values of their culture, while still others may be most influenced by the norms of the particular organization for which they work. Beyond this, an individual's preferences for how much time is spent working vs. not working changes throughout the life course. A person's age, health status, and whether they have young children or elders to care for at home will influence how devoted they are to their work. It is important for each individual to examine their own preferences for how they wish to spend their time and it is equally important for organizations to model a culture of personal-professional life balance.

CLINICAL SUPERVISION

Clinical Supervision is a practice that was developed by early psychotherapists to assist practitioners in learning from their experiences, progressing professionally, and to monitor the quality of services being administered to patients. Today, different forms of supervision are used by a wide variety of disciplines.

Clinical supervision usually consists of a private meeting between a senior clinician and a junior clinician, but can take many different forms. It can occur in groups where a senior or experienced clinician facilitates clinical learning, it can occur one on one with experienced clinicians who may formally or informally consult with each other for continued learning, and in the absence of a clinical supervisor, clinicians may have “supervision” by consulting with a senior clinician who is not their direct supervisor.

Because clinical supervision is broad, it can be helpful to distinguish between the different types of supervision in order to provide clarity for both the supervisee and the supervisor.

Administrative Supervision: Administrative supervision is primarily focused on the administrative competencies and tasks of the supervisee. It includes monitoring productivity, scheduling, EHR training and issues, paperwork, report writing, rules, policies, protocols, legal and ethical issues, and related information-specific topics. Any disciplinary actions and annual or semi-annual evaluations also fall into this category but can overlap with the following categories, as well. Administrative supervision is sometimes referred to as “supportive” supervision, in that the task of the supervisor is to provide the necessary organizational and operational supports for the supervisee so that they can provide quality care to their patients.

Clinical Supervision: The term clinical supervision is often used as a blanket term to refer to any supervision that occurs between a therapist and his or her supervisor who is also a therapist. It is usually didactic in form and focused on continued learning in the clinical realm. It addresses case presentations and reviews, diagnostic impressions and general diagnosis competencies, enhancing learning of evidence-based research supported interventions, reviewing interventions and treatment plans, evaluating the clinical progress of patients, and increasing the clinician’s overall insight and knowledge about particular conditions and treatments. Often times, clinical supervision will also include administrative topics as they intersect with clinical considerations.

Reflective Supervision: Reflective supervision is distinct from the other types of supervision in that it is always clinically focused but also often includes administrative topics. At the heart of reflective supervision is attention to relationships, including the relationship between supervisor and supervisee, the relationship between the supervisee and their patients and families, and how these relationships affect each other. In reflective supervision, the supervisor and supervisee strive to model the same sort of relationship that would be desired between a therapist and a patient. This is sometimes referred to as the “parallel process”, or as Jeree Pawl would say, “Do unto others as you would have others do unto others.” In reflective supervision there is also a greater emphasis on attending to the emotional content of the therapist’s work. The supervisor aims to increase the supervisee’s insight and learning about how their emotions impact their work and ultimately, the patient’s process. In reflective supervision the supervisor spends much more time listening than they do talking or teaching. This allows the supervisee to find his or her own beliefs, perceptions, and solutions to problems. Again, this serves to model what the supervisee should be able to provide to their patients. In reflective supervision the initial focus is on forming a trusting relationship between supervisor and supervisee. The focus then shifts to using the safety of the relationship to allow the supervisee to explore the parallel process, self-reflect, learn to identify emotions, and use them purposefully in therapy with patients.

TIPS TO MAXIMIZE THE FRUITFULNESS OF SUPERVISION:

- Set a regular time to meet. It may be necessary for the clinician to advocate for this. Clinical and reflective supervision can be particularly challenging in integrated settings, in that there is not a corollary in the medical culture. Sometimes certain organizations or clinics have difficulty with understanding the importance, value, and professional necessity of supervision and this might be demonstrated when little or no formal time is carved out of schedules for clinical supervision meetings.
- Whenever possible, meet before patient care time begins, before a lunch break, or at another time that provides sufficient space for focused reflection.
- The supervisee should come prepared with clinical questions, case presentations, reflections, or other topics they would like to discuss. The supervisor may have some agenda items of their own, but the supervisee should be largely responsible for directing the content of the meetings and focusing them on where they would like input, support, and growth.
- The supervisee should elicit feedback from their supervisor directly. Even experienced supervisors can have difficulty with giving feedback, particularly if they feel it is negative. Encouraging feedback directly can motivate supervisors to share any important observations they may have about the supervisee.
- As related to the above, when feedback is received, the supervisee should avoid the urge to explain, defend, deny, or blame. These are normal defense mechanisms for most people as they begin evaluating the negative feedback they receive, but this type of response can inhibit further feedback, denying the supervisee of the opportunity to grow and develop fully. When supervisees feel the need to defend themselves, they can say “Thank you. I will think about what you said and we can talk about it next time.”
- Cultivate an awareness of the supervisee's feelings as different topics are discussed. This practice is a parallel process for self-awareness in sessions with patients and even if the supervisor does not explicitly engage in reflective supervision, practicing this awareness will enhance the therapist's skills.
- Supervisees should be willing to utilize the relationship with their supervisor as a tool for learning. Supervision can teach one a lot about their patterns of relating to authority, relating to women or men, seeking approval, rebellion, avoidance, and transference. When a supervisee is willing to articulate these insights and observations, a supervisor can be a partner in maximizing learning. The more self-insight a therapist has, the more they can trust their own perceptions and insights during their work with patients.
- Supervisees should remain as open and curious as possible. Many professionals have been through years of schooling (and perhaps family systems) that rewarded the understanding and knowing of things. Cultivating curiosity and “not knowing” sometimes takes practice.
- As much as possible, the supervisee should avoid critical or harsh judgment of themselves and others. This is because judgment is the opposite of empathy and empathy is the foundation for growth. However, when the supervisee does find that they are judging a patient or their own abilities, they can use supervision time to increase their insight, explore the judgment, and resolve it. To this end, we can acknowledge professional growth as the diligent practice of noticing, examining, and addressing areas of judgment in an effort to have fewer and fewer judgments as

time goes on.

For a thoughtful and thorough review of how clinical supervision is specifically implemented in the integrated setting, please see Nancy Facher, LCSW, MHP's paper, *The Clinical Supervisor in Integrated Behavioral Health: Key to Achieving The Quadruple Aim*, located in the appendix.

Conclusion

SUMMARY

Through efforts to integrate behavioral health and primary care, providers and organizations have the opportunity to ensure that all patients with behavioral health needs are identified, offered quality services, and that these services are coordinated in a meaningful way with other aspects of their healthcare. On a broader level, integrating behavioral health can also serve as a vehicle to embed the principles of whole-person care and humanize the healthcare experience for patients, families, and employees.

We hope that this manual has served as a useful resource for supporting and enhancing the work of providers in integrated behavioral health settings, whether they are new or seasoned professionals. Moreover, we hope that the overview of the foundational operational, leadership, cultural, and clinical aspects of a whole-person care system will help providers as they go forward in with the complex work that they do with patients and families, as well as in lead the cultural transformation of healthcare.

Finally, in consideration of the constant evolution of the field and the broad array of organizations practicing or developing integrated systems, it is important to reiterate that there is no single, dominant, or correct definition of integrated behavioral health. Indeed, striving to find the definitive “models” that all should adopt, may be at odds with some of the fundamental principles of behavioral health: Autonomy, empowerment and honoring unique strengths and limitations. We encourage organizations to collectively identify and articulate a vision for their highest good, build on the organizational and community strengths in enhancing their systems, and explore and embrace the strategies and techniques that work best for their patients and employees.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

- American Society for Addictive Medicine: www.ASAM.org
- The Recovery Research Institute (Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School): www.recoveryanswers.org
- A Meta-Analysis of Research on Motivational Interviewing Treatment Effectiveness (MARMITE) (Annual Review of Clinical Psychology): http://www.motivationalinterview.net/library/MARMITE_files/v3_document.htm
- Toxic Stress, Behavioral Health, and the Next Major Era in Public Health (Mental Health America): <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/sites/default/files/Toxic Stress Final.pdf>
- The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente's Health Appraisal Clinic): <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/>
- Resources for Integrated Behavioral Healthcare (Mary Rainwater and Elizabeth Morrison): <http://www.blueshieldcafoundation.org/sites/default/files/u9/Resources for Integrated BH Info.pdf>
- Resources for Mental Health Prevalence Data (Mary Rainwater and Elizabeth Morrison): <http://www.blueshieldcafoundation.org/sites/default/files/u9/Prevalence Data Resource Page%20.pdf>
- Article on patient acceptance level (Arndt Büssing, Peter F Matthiessen, and Götz Mundle - Health Qual Life Outcomes) <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2262062/>
- Table of for measuring patient level of acceptance (Arndt Büssing, Peter F Matthiessen, and Götz Mundle - Health Qual Life Outcomes) <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2262062/table/T2/>
- Confidentiality, HIPPA, and 42-CFR (SAMHSA): http://www.integration.samhsa.gov/operations-administration/the_confidentiality_of_alcohol_and_drug_abuse.pdf
- FAQs for confidentiality, laws, and regulations (SAMHSA) <http://beta.samhsa.gov/about-us/who-we-are/laws>
- Tools and Resources for the therapeutic alliance (Scott Miller): ScottdMiller.com
- PST training certification: http://www.impact-uw.org/training/problem_solving.html.
- PST Manual (Mark Hegel, PhD and Patricia Areán, PhD for the IMPACT study): http://www.impact-uw.org/files/PST-PC_Manual.pdf
- Research and writings about self-compassion and compassion fatigue for helping professionals (The Greater Good Science Center): <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu>.

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APPENDIX

Environmental Empathy Assessment

Date: _____
 Time: _____
 Location: _____
 Assessed by: _____

Section 1: Waiting Room/ Front Office Experience			
Description	Yes	No	Comments
Is there any staff in the waiting room (not behind the desk)?			
Do the staff in the waiting room interact or converse with clients?			
Do the staff offer clients water or other refreshments?			
Is the waiting room clean, neat, bookcases full, etc.?			
Is the temperature of the room comfortable?			
If there are magazines, are all magazines less than 1 month old, in good condition, and appropriate for the organization?			
Do the walls reflect care? (Nothing unframed on walls, no 'command' signs, no taped documents, no staff information observable to clients, no bare walls, no inappropriate art, etc.)			
Do the staff answering phones identify themselves to callers?			
Do the staff answering phones answer with a smile in their voice?			

Did the staff acknowledge clients within 5 seconds of walking into building?					
Are all clients greeted with a salutation? (Good Morning, Hello, Hi)					
Were 'connecting statements' observed?					
Are children greeted?					
Is there a children's area/table? Are there crayons and coloring pages? Clean and neat?					
Does the staff keep clients informed about wait times?					
Does staff apologize easily?					
Is all furniture in good condition? (no rips or stains)					
Does staff apologize easily?					
Is all furniture in good condition? (no rips or stains)					
Description	Smile	Greet	Eye Contact	None	Comments
Did staff acknowledge clients with a greeting, in the first 5 seconds of walking into building?					
Client 1					
Client 2					
Client 3					
Client 4					
Does staff acknowledge clients waiting in line? If so, how?					
Client 1					
Client 2					

Client 3			-		
Client 4					

Section 2: Back Office			
Description	Yes	No	Comments
Did the clinician/ MA come into the waiting room to get client? (Not call from door?)			
Client 1			
Client 2			
Client 3			
Client 4			
Did the clinician/MA greet, smile and make eye contact with client in the first few seconds of contact?			
Client 1			
Client 2			
Client 3			
Client 4			
Did the clinician/MA introduce him/herself to client?			
Were 'connecting statements' observed?			
Did the clinician/MA walk side by side with client when leaving the waiting room?			

Section 3: General					
Description	Smile	Greet	Eye Contact	None	Comments
Do the staff that walk by you in the parking lot or hallways greet clients, smile, and make eye contact first?					
Employee 1					
Employee 2					
Employee 3					
Parking lot: is parking lot clean, free of garbage, clearly marked for parking, easy access to parking, etc.	Comments:				
Building exterior/ landscaping: is building clean, landscaping done, are there sufficient garbage cans (not full), do the doors have the correct names, absence of command signs?	Comments:				
Signage inside the clinic: is signage clear about where clients should go? No 'command signs' present.	Comments:				
Bathrooms: are bathrooms clean, and well stocked?	Comments:				

Employees and Family Members as Patients

Purpose

Organization X employees and family members are often patients of *Organization X*. This dual relationship (employees' as patients and family members of patients) can sometimes be complex for those providing treatment and for the employee or their family members. This document has been created to provide clarity on this issue.

Principle

- HIPAA
- AMA Code of Medical Ethics
- NASW, APA and AAMFT code of ethics

Policy

To adhere to the professions code of ethics of the different respective professions, regarding the cautions of engaging in dual relationships (coworker/family member and patient).

- To ensure proper protections (HIPAA, etc.) for employees who are also patients of *Organization X* and to clarify boundaries, in order to prevent problems that may damage working and familial relationships.
- To ensure adherence with Medicare General Exclusion from Coverage guidelines in regards to treating immediate relatives.
- To ensure adherence with *Organization X* insurance carriers

Scope

All *Organization X* Employees

Definitions

Term	Definition
Relative	Any services rendered to a Covered Person by a relative (i.e., a spouse, or a parent, brother, sister or child of the Employee or of the Employee spouse) or anyone who customarily lives in the Covered Person's household.
Members of Patients Household	Those related by blood, marriage or adoption, domestic employees and other people who live together as part of a single-family unit. A roomer or boarder is not included.
Family Member or Immediate Relative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Husband and wife • Natural or adoptive parent, child or sibling • Stepparent, stepchild, stepbrother, stepsister

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Father-in-law, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, son-in-law, and daughter-in-law • Grandparent(s) and grandchild(ren) and their spouses • Domestic Partner, legally or not
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Employees: Who Can See Who?

Providers can provide ongoing patient care services to employees that they do not work with directly. 'Directly work with' typically meant at the same clinic when the clinic is small, or on the same care team, in larger clinic. However,

- Providers can see employees they work with, as patients, when it appears to be a single episode for acute care. For example, if a medical assistant thinks she may have strep throat, the medical provider or nurse in the clinic or on the team, can test for strep, order medications if it is positive, and write a note for HR that the employee needs to go home.
- Behavioral Health (BH) providers should avoid seeing employees, and their family members as patients, when they have had, or will likely have, any more than superficial contact. For example, a BH provider should avoid seeing an employee as a patient, who is a receptionist at the clinic they work at. They may see a receptionist as a patient, who works at another clinic, and who they have not had significant contact with. This is due to behavioral health providers' code of ethics, which cautions strongly against this.

Treating the Employee/ Patient

The employee/patient must be flowed through and billed for and *must not be working ('signed in')* when receiving care.

- The patient/employee must sign all normal patient paperwork
- The Employee is responsible for all co-pays at the time of service
- Special care must be taken to adhere strictly to HIPAA regarding sharing of any patient information.

When NOT To Provide Care to Employee/ Patient

Providers will decline any request by supervisors to intervene by providing care to employees who are having work difficulties, conflicts with co-workers, or other work related problems. For example, a behavioral health provider should decline a supervisors request for them to evaluate an employee they feel has depression that is impacting their attendance.

- While Behavioral Health providers in particular may provide general consultative assistance to supervisors in these matters (for example, share information about depression symptoms), the employees in questions should not become patients of the BH or medical provider for a reason that is work related.

All providers should strongly consider refraining from providing services to employee/patients whose primary presenting problems are:

1. Related to work difficulties
2. Chronic pain management
3. Disability paperwork or other sensitive areas which frequently cause problems for both the employee/patient as well as the organization.
4. Medical Leave of Absences

Options for Employees

1. Employees can be seen as ongoing patients by providers they do not work with closely.
2. Employees can be seen for single episode, acute problems by providers they work with as long as the guidelines for providing care are adhered to.
3. Employees can and should be encouraged to use the EAP as a first option for conditions related to behavioral health concerns.

Family Members: Who Can See Who?

1. Family members can be seen for single episode, acute problems by providers that are not Immediate Family Members.
2. Family members can and should be encouraged to use the EAP as a first option for conditions related to behavioral health.
3. Family members are encouraged to seek treatment with a non-relative Provider at an *Organization X* site that their Immediate Family Member is not affiliated with.
4. The *Organization X* Provider may reserve the right to transfer or refrain from treating an employee or an employees' family member(s) or member of the household if they feel that professional objectivity, personal feeling, or discomfort may influence and affect the patient's care and/or outcome.

Treating the Family Member/Patient

The employee or employee family member must be flowed through the practice management system and billed for. The employee must not be working when receiving care (re: must 'clock out')

- The patient/ employee must sign all normal patient paperwork.
- The patient/employee is responsible for all co-pays at the time of service.
- Special care must be taken to adhere strictly to HIPAA, regarding sharing of any patient information. This means, for example, that if *Organization X* Human Resource department, or an *Organization X* supervisor, asks for protected health information on an employee, the medical or behavioral health provider or their healthcare team members cannot provide this without a signed release of information. Once a licensed provider or a healthcare team member has provided services to an employee as a patient, all the employee's health information is protected just as with any other patient.

Verify Insurance Coverage

The Front Office should verify the insurance coverage for all patients upon check in.

- Due to Medicare exclusions we must adhere to policy guidelines as treating Immediate Family Members is an exclusion under Medicare and cannot be billed.

Organization X – GENERAL CLINICAL SERVICES CONSENT

Before you give your consent, be sure you understand the information given below. If you have any questions, we will be happy to talk about them with you. You may ask for a copy of this form.

I understand that I can ask *Organization X* staff for language interpreter services in order to understand the written or spoken information given to me during my healthcare visits. I understand that free interpretive services will be provided if necessary.

Consent for Treatment: I request *Organization X* to provide me with healthcare services, including but not limited to medical care, behavioral healthcare and substance abuse services, health education services and insurance enrollment services. I understand that I will be given information about the test(s), treatment(s), procedure(s), and medication(s) recommended to me, including their benefits, risks, possible problems/complications, and any alternate choices I may have. I understand that all services I receive will be documented in my electronic health record and are protected health information. I understand that *Organization X* strives to provide integrated care, which ensures all members of my care team have access to important health information central to my care. I understand that I can ask questions about anything in this document. I hereby request that a person authorized by *Organization X* provide appropriate evaluation, testing, and treatment. I understand that I may be given referrals for further diagnosis or treatment, if necessary for my health.

Release of Information: I understand that confidentiality will be maintained as described in the Notice of Health Information Privacy Practices. I consent to the use and disclosure of my health information as described in Notice of Health Information Privacy Practices. I understand that services are confidential, however, there are some exceptions to this. All *Organization X* employees are legally bound, in cases of life threatening emergencies and physical and sexual abuse of minors, the elderly and dependent adults, to inform the appropriate agencies. In the case of domestic violence (when there is a current injury from the violence) *Organization X* medical providers must report this to the police. *Organization X* behavioral health providers (counselors) and substance abuse providers are not mandated by law to report this, as it is considered confidential information and cannot be disclosed without permission from you.

Assignment of Insurance Benefit: I hereby authorize payment directly to *Organization X* of benefits otherwise payable to me but not to exceed *Organization X*'s regular charges for this service. **I understand that I am financially responsible to *Organization X* for any charges not covered by my insurance.**

Financial Agreement: I agree to pay all charges that are not payable by insurance or third party. I agree to abide by the terms and conditions of *Organization X*'s Collections Policy and agree to pay for attorney fees or other expenses incurred in the collection of payment due.

Statement to Permit Payment of Medicare Insurance Benefits to Organization X: I certify that the information given by me in applying for payment under Title XVIII of the Social Security Act is correct. I authorize release of any information needed to act on this request. I request that payment of authorized benefits be made on my behalf.

Acceptance of Responsibility for Co-Payments: I understand that I am responsible for any health insurance deductibles or co-payments, including a twenty percent (20%) co-payment for authorized services covered by Medicare.

I hereby acknowledge receipt of *Organization X*'s *Notice of Health Information Privacy Practices*. The undersigned certifies that I have read and understood the information above and authorizes services to be provided by *Organization X* to me, or to the patient if I am serving as a general agent for the patient, and accepts its terms.

Print Name

Signature of Patient or Legal Guardian

Date Signed

Witness

Date Signed

Protected Health Information Release Consent

Full Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____

This will allow _____ to use or release my protected health information to _____ as described below for the following uses: _____

Complete copy of medical record Other (describe):

Dates of care included: _____ to _____

Request for records to be provided: (Please check off) Electronically Paper

I understand that if initialed below, the information allowed for release may relate to: **(only initial all that apply)**

- ___ Mental health condition (if you have seen a counselor here)
- ___ HIV/AIDS test results
- ___ Drug or alcohol treatment (if you have seen a counselor for this or attended group for this)

1. I understand that I may inspect or copy the protected health information describe by this consent form.
2. I am not required to sign this in order to receive services or benefits at *Organization X*.
3. The person who receives my information cannot release it to other people or agencies unless I sign another release of information with them.
4. I can cancel this consent form at any time in writing or verbally. My canceling will take effect as soon as it is received, except to the point that others have acted as a result of this consent form.
5. *Organization X* will not use or share my health information for marketing or payment without letting me know.

Signature of individual or representative

Date

[Relationship of representative]

* * * *

EXPIRATION DATE: This consent will expire on [date or event] _____.
(If no date or event is written, expiration is six months from the date it was signed.)

Integration of the Patient Health Record

POLICY:

It is the policy of Organization X to have patient health records integrated, combining documentation of different members of the multidisciplinary health team into one whole health record.

PURPOSE:

In order to ensure high quality, whole person care, patient’s health records must be integrated, with the multidisciplinary team sharing one record. Due to historical silos of treatment between mental health, physical health and substance abuse treatment, there is often confusion about the specific protocols and procedures for maintaining an integrated health record. This policy establishes guidelines to ensure consistency.

SCOPE:

Medical Providers, Behavioral Health Providers, Substance Abuse Providers, Care Managers, Dental Providers, all other direct service support staff, and Medical Records staff.

PROCEDURE:

Documentation:

- All care notes are documented in the patient’s record, without protections beyond HIPPA and 42 CFR. This means no firewalls, “confidential” tab or other markers indicating particular information is more protected than others.
- Each discipline documents in templates specific to their discipline (behavioral health must have a behavioral health template; medical must have medical templates, etc.), however, whenever possible, shared templates exist to capture data appropriate to providing integrated care, such as social and environmental information.
- Behavioral health providers (including substance abuse providers) who have not worked in integrated systems before will receive training on appropriate documentation, with patient privacy protection as the principle. Training will cover some common important differences in how documentation is approached between traditional behavioral health settings and integrated settings, including, but not limited to:
 1. Documentation is not a “psychotherapy note”. The Medicaid definition of a psychotherapy note refers to notes that are rarely kept by clinicians anymore. They document separate, private, themes present in treatment such as countertransference and similar clinician-focused subjects. The definition of psychotherapy notes does not include diagnosis, functional status, treatment plans, symptoms and progress. See below, as stated in the CMS Manual:

“...The Privacy Rule in 45 CFR §164.501 defines psychotherapy notes as notes recorded by a mental health professional that document or analyze the contents of a counseling session and that are separated from the rest of a medical record. The definition of psychotherapy notes expressly excludes: Medication prescription and monitoring, counseling session start and stop times, the modalities and frequencies of treatment furnished, results of clinical tests, and any summary of diagnosis, functional status, treatment plan, symptoms, prognosis, progress, and progress to date. Physically integrating this information into protected psychotherapy notes

does not automatically transform it into protected information.”

2. Less time is spent on documentation, in general. There is a marked lack of traditional assessments and reports. The focus is on documenting the services.
3. Documentation is focused on where the patient is focused. In integrated settings, clinicians document presenting problems, where the patient is at, and their goals.
4. Documentation is oriented towards symptom amelioration, behavioral change and a return to function with an emphasis on ‘Treating to Target’. This means that the clinician and the patient are clear on both what the goal of therapy is, how progress is going to be measured to achieve that goal, and any changes in treatment or seeking consultation to improve care when goals are not met.
5. Documentation is more general when it comes to trauma and other sensitive subjects. Because the EHR is shared in integrated settings, care should be taken to protect the patient’s privacy as much as possible. “Childhood Trauma is endorsed; sexual abuse by grandfather” is a sufficient note to put in the EHR, as opposed to a paragraph detailing the abuse’s frequency or severity. Care should also be taken in documenting subjects such as infidelity, sexual conditions or concerns, immigration status and criminal behavior. Documentation should only consist of that which is medically necessary for the health team to know, as well as the minimum necessary for the clinician to provide effective care.
6. All patient diagnoses (or “problem lists”) should be shared. Behavioral health diagnoses should appear alongside medical diagnoses.
7. Whenever possible (as EHR products allow) patient goals and provider recommendations should be integrated and easily viewable by all members of the treatment team (i.e. a shared care plan).
8. As with any healthcare entity, all staff are to be fully trained in HIPAA.
9. For all records, training protocols and security measures should be in place to ensure information is accessed only by those who “need to know” for treatment purposes.

Operational Supports for Integrated Records:

- Releases of Information should clearly reflect different categories of records, including identifying behavioral health and substance abuse records to ensure patients have a clear understanding and choice about what records they are selecting to be released. The release of information should meet 42-CFR standards, as they are slightly more rigorous than HIPAA.
- “Consent to Treat” documents should be integrated (one consent to treat for all services, as opposed to separate consent to treat for medical care, behavioral health and substance abuse). The consent should clearly articulate the organizations integrated care practice, informing patients that all visits/services are documented in a shared record. The consent to treat should also specify differences in mandated reporting between treating providers, such as domestic violence reporting.
- Due to the historical differences in documentation practices in the behavioral health field (including substance abuse), providers should discuss the above with patients at the onset of treatment, to ensure understanding and answer questions they may have. Providers should also provide information about the benefits of integrated documentation for patient’s care, as well as the limits on what is documented. Some organizations choose to have a written document that assists with this conversation.

Beacon Reimbursement Codes

Medical Central California

CPT Code	Description				
Diagnostic Evaluation		<i>MD</i>	<i>PhD/ PsyD</i>	<i>ARNP</i>	<i>LCSW/ LMFT</i>
90791	Diagnostic evaluation with no medical	\$124.57	\$124.57	\$105.88	\$93.43
90792	Diagnostic evaluation with medical	\$101.26	-	\$86.07	-
Medical Evaluation and Management (E/M)					
99205	New Patient, Evaluation and Management (60 min):	\$167.68	-	\$142.53	-
99212	Medication Management - 10 min	\$ 36.71	-	\$ 31.21	-
99213	Medication Management - 15 min	\$ 60.56	-	\$ 51.48	-
99214	Medication Management - 25 min	\$ 64.13	-	\$ 75.46	-
99215	Medication Management - 45 min	\$ 65.13	-	\$100.71	-
Psychotherapy					
90832	Psychotherapy 30 (16-37) min	-	\$ 51.53	\$ 43.80	\$ 38.65
90834	Psychotherapy 45 (38-52) min	-	\$ 65.82	\$ 55.95	\$ 49.37
90837	Psychotherapy 60 (53+) min	-	\$ 96.17	\$ 81.74	\$ 72.13
90853	Group Therapy	-	\$ 19.85	\$ 16.87	\$ 14.89
Psychological and Neuropsychological Testing					
96101	Psychological testing		\$ 67.65		
96111	Developmental Testing, extended		\$103.50		
96116	Neurobehavioral status exam		\$ 72.82		
96118	Neuropsychological testing (per hour of face-to-face time)		\$ 75.62		

The Clinical Supervisor in Integrated Behavioral Health: Key to Achieving *The Quadruple Aim*

Nancy Facher, LCSW, MPH

Executive Summary

Integrated Behavioral Health (IBH) aims to bridge the gap between medical and behavioral health care by bringing behavioral health clinicians (BHCs) into primary care. A clinical supervisor oversees the work of the BHCs and in this way plays a key role in all aspects of integrated, interdisciplinary care. The clinical supervisor is essential to the achievement of The Quadruple Aim, a paradigm of health care system improvement that involves: 1) Improving the health of populations, 2) Enhancing the patient experience, 3) Reducing cost per capita, and 4) Improving the provider experience (Bodenheimer and Sinsky, 2014). The clinical supervisor plays a key role in the achievement of these four aims through the provision of training and clinical oversight of behavioral health clinicians, through collaboration with medical and operational leadership, and by fostering collaboration across disciplines.

The clinical supervisor recruits, hires and trains BHCs and introduces them to the fast pace and complex interdisciplinary work of primary care. With this foundation in place, clinical supervisors promote the first aim: population health. Clinical supervisors teach how to deliver behavioral health care for a population of patients and then how to measure its reach and impact. They focus on the second aim by supporting the BHC in providing patient-centered care from both operational and clinical perspectives. Clinical supervisors also play an essential role in the third aim by promoting clinical pathways and approaches that provide care in a cost effective manner. Finally, the clinical supervisor improves the experiences of the primary care provider and that of the behavioral health clinician so that they can work together effectively.

Clinical supervisors promote efficient and effective practices that help sustain empathic connection. They introduce tools and algorithms for outcome measurement and triage. They lead program development and nurture interdisciplinary relationships. They serve as a buffer against the BHC's chronic exposure to trauma, and they assist in monitoring patient safety. The clinical supervisor's focus on all four aims (cost, quality, patient experience and provider experience) requires that the supervisor possesses a combination of empathy, clinical knowledge, pragmatism, business acumen, adaptability, flexibility, professional maturity, and resilience. A strong clinical supervisor is an essential, but undervalued resource. This article reviews the role and scope of the clinical supervisor in Integrated Behavioral Health settings, demonstrates the importance of the clinical supervisor to the achievement of The Quadruple Aim, and encourages increased attention to and investment in this role.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, Integrated Behavioral Health (IBH) – which brings behavioral health clinicians into the primary care team – has emerged as a key strategy to bridge the gap between medical and behavioral health care. In IBH, clinical supervisors oversee the work of behavioral health clinicians (BHCs), who provide psychological assessment, treatment, linkage and referral. The scope and role of the clinical supervisor is critical to achievement of The Quadruple Aim, a paradigm for health care system improvement. This framework was expanded from the widely adopted Triple Aim (Berwick, Nolan and Whittington, 2008) which posited that three dimensions were essential for improvement of health care system delivery: (1) Improving the health of populations; 2) Enhancing the patient experience; and 3) Reducing cost per capita. In 2014, Drs. Tom Bodenheimer and Christine Sinsky added a fourth dimension: improving the provider experience (Bodenheimer

and Sinsky, 2014). Unacknowledged, behind the scenes, and at times invisible to daily operations, the clinical supervisor is key to the achievement of The Quadruple Aim. Yet, this role is absent from the literature on Integrated Behavioral Health.

Clinical Supervision in Behavioral Health Settings

In traditional behavioral health settings, BHCs participate in “clinical supervision,” in which an experienced and licensed therapist trains and/or oversees a junior, typically unlicensed, therapist. Much like an attending physician trains a resident, the supervising BHC has authority to direct the work of the clinician and performs what are essentially teaching, coaching, oversight and quality assurance functions. When supervisees become licensed, the clinical supervisor transitions to the role of mentor and consultant. However, unlike attending physicians and medical residents, or medical residents with interns, this clinical consultation continues throughout one’s career to manage subjectivity, to identify blind spots, to ensure sound clinical decision-making, and ultimately to improve the quality of care. Through the discussion of individual cases, the clinical supervisor ensures appropriate assessment, diagnosis, and selection and application of treatment methodologies through patient engagement, assessment, intervention, and the end of treatment. The supervisor provides a framework for ethical practice, including confidentiality and limits to it, informed consent, and the maintenance of boundaries. In a traditional supervisory relationship, the supervisee brings forward their subjective reactions to the client for examination and the scheduled hour is almost sacred in its reliability and regularity. Most importantly, through discussion and reflection, the clinical supervisor helps ensure patient safety throughout.

Clinical Supervision in Integrated Behavioral Health Settings

As the structure and model for clinical supervision is absent from the literature on Integrated Behavioral Health, little is known about clinical supervision in primary care settings or the range of resources allocated by community clinics for this role. What follows are my observations from almost a decade of overseeing a team of dedicated clinical supervisors and BHCs mostly in urban safety net clinics.

The allocation of resources to clinical supervision may depend on the model of integration, and there appears to be a wide range of how many resources are allocated to clinical supervision even when models of care delivery are relatively similar. One factor in this variation is the ability of clinics to hire licensed clinicians, which are often in high demand. In community clinics that are dependent on bilingual staff to provide care, unlicensed staff is often hired to work under the direction of a clinical supervisor, who then has the legal responsibility for their work. In fact, unlicensed clinicians typically receive more frequent supervision than licensed clinicians. In a model in which all unlicensed BHCs receive regular weekly individual supervision and all licensed BHCs receive regular bi-weekly supervision, along with group supervision, the allocation of the clinical supervisor’s time is significant. When the clinical supervisor’s role goes beyond training and oversight to include performance evaluation, crisis consultation, quality assurance, and program development, the need for clinical supervision time is even greater.

A Typical Day in a Community Health Center

One clinical supervisor starts her day by reviewing and co-signing notes from an unlicensed, relatively new BHC who is working under her license. She looks for accuracy in assessment, diagnosis and formulation of the treatment plan; monitors fidelity to evidence-based practice; evaluates the patient’s response to the intervention; and decides whether the documentation achieves the balance of being both concise and comprehensive. The clinical supervisor observes that the BHC included an objective measure and that the ICD-

10 code is correct and reimbursable. Finally, she reviews the BHC's schedule on that date, and observes that this BHC fit in two urgent patients into her schedule and also ran a group.

She next meets with an experienced BHC. She discusses how to optimize the BHC's schedule, and reviews three high-risk patients who are due to come in that day or the next. All three patients are being closely monitored for suicidality, with some combinations of impulsivity, substance abuse and/or previous hospitalizations. Crisis stabilization is needed but unavailable for all three and none meet the criteria for an involuntary psychiatric hold. The patients cannot be linked to other behavioral health services outside primary care because of barriers such as transportation, language, lack of coverage, or previous negative experiences with behavioral health care services. The clinical supervisor reviews the details in depth, because the level of severity is far greater than what should be managed in primary care. Together with the BHC, they plan for what the BHC should do if any of the patients don't come to their appointments. They move on to discuss and plan for the new treatment group the BHC is about to begin. The BHC closes by mentioning there are ten other patients with high acuity that they didn't have time to discuss.

Next, the supervisor meets with another BHC and they discuss four patients. The first is a patient with school refusal. The BHC is very experienced in treating adults, but has never worked with parents or children before. They next discuss a patient who is dually diagnosed with a substance abuse disorder and schizophrenia; the BHC cannot locate an appropriate treatment program. The third patient is a patient with two decades of alcohol dependence. The patient is ready for treatment and was accepted into a residential program that requires that he receive a prescription for a benzodiazepine. However, the medical provider is concerned about the safety risk from concomitant alcohol and benzodiazepine use, and will not refill the prescription because the patient failed to keep appointments. The patient has begun to make frequent appearances to the Emergency Department, where he is prescribed benzodiazepines and then returns to the primary care clinic for help with his drinking. The clinical supervisor directs the BHC to convene a conversation between the consulting psychiatrist and the PCP to formulate a plan that will help this patient finally access treatment for his alcohol abuse. The fourth and final patient they discuss is new; he was referred to the BHC because he was just assaulted. Placed on the agenda for next time are the BHC's interest in learning more about working with geriatric patients; how to engage adolescents; and how to speak with a medical provider who schedules patients with situational stressors into the BHC's "urgent" appointment time slot, reducing access for actively suicidal patients. The clinical supervisor goes to meet her next supervisee. It's 11am.

Throughout the day, the clinical supervisor supports, listens, teaches, guides, and directs. In every encounter, the clinical supervisor is working on quality, patient experience, cost, and both the BHC's and/or primary care provider's (PCP) experience – all aspects of The Quadruple Aim. (See Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1: The Clinical Supervisor's Impact on The Quadruple Aim

Improving the Health of Populations	Reducing Cost Per Capita	Enhancing the Patient Experience	Improving the Provider Experience
Evidence-Based Practices Metrics Treatment to Target Behavioral Health Screening	Schedule Optimization Behavioral Health Triage Maximizing Billing Workforce Development Shared Visits	Reduced Wait Time Same Day Access Patient Engagement Cycle of Caring	Collaboration Consultation Warm Handoffs Promotion of Care Team Burnout Prevention Preventing Vicarious Trauma

Figure 2: How The Clinical Supervisor Impacts The Quadruple Aim

Methods			
Advocating		Problem-Solving	
Coaching		Promoting	
Encouraging		Recruiting	
Evaluating Performance		Supporting	
Modeling Flexibility		Training	
Monitoring		Translating between Disciplines	

The Role Of The Clinical Supervisor In Achievement Of The Quadruple Aim

Clinical Supervisors Help BHCs Adapt To Primary Care Behavioral Health

In IBH settings the clinical supervisor has additional responsibilities that go beyond what's expected in supervision of those practicing in traditional behavioral health settings. The clinical supervisor recruits, hires and prepares BHCs for their role in primary care. While graduate level behavioral health training has pivoted to include brief treatment modalities, few training programs prepare BHCs for the fast pace and complex interdisciplinary work of primary care, and even where they do, few trainees have the opportunity to develop mastery during their studies. The clinical supervisor recruits and hires BHCs who are flexible and who have the personal attributes and the clinical range to develop the clinical competencies needed in the complex primary care environment. Candidates must be open to adapting approaches and clinical modalities to meet not only the volume and pace but also the clinical diversity seen in primary care. The clinical supervisor “speaks” both behavioral health and primary care, and therefore, when interviewing and hiring, can discern a good fit: a combination of clinical competence and flexibility, and openness to learning how to work in primary care.

Once hired, the clinical supervisor oversees on-the-job training. In clinics hiring unlicensed BHCs, the clinical supervisor may be training newer BHCs in the core skills such as patient engagement, assessment, differential diagnosis, and treatment. Training new, unlicensed BHCs requires close, weekly supervision; review and co-signature of clinical documentation; and ongoing consultation as questions – especially safety concerns – inevitably arise. Training one unlicensed BHC can require a minimum of several hours a week of teaching and oversight for many months (or more, depending on the level of risk of the patient population).

Even licensed clinicians need assistance adapting to primary care, and have to make adjustments to their established ways of practicing. The clinical supervisor helps experienced BHCs modify brief treatment modalities to use them in primary care, which requires challenging therapist “sacred cows”. First, clinic operations require flexible scheduling such as “overbooking” and/or accommodating “walk-ins” and “warm handoffs” or interruptions or introductions or emergencies. Thus, the BHC accustomed to the sacred “50-minute hour” has to make an adjustment. Second, the frequency, duration of visits and number of visits in an “episode of care” may be reduced. For example, a therapist working in a traditional setting may see seven patients at most in a day for visits that are 50 minutes in length, whereas a BHC in primary care may see anywhere from 7 – 12 patients, and the length of visits typically ranges from 15 to 45 minutes, every other week. And BHCs must have the skill and flexibility to lengthen and shorten a visit on the spot, as competing demands require.

The clinical supervisor also helps clinicians adjust to differences in the nature of the supervisory relationship itself. In IBH settings, behavioral health clinicians document in a shared medical record that is accessible to members of the care team. This is a big adjustment for clinicians who are not accustomed to a shared record. And, the clinical supervisor helps the clinician adapt to the different nature of the supervisory relationship itself. Traditionally, the clinical supervisor focuses on the patient and the supervisee. In Integrated Behavioral Health, the emphasis in clinical supervision is on the client, the systems and the population – and the supervisee.

The First Aim: Improving the Health of Populations

Clinical Supervisors Facilitate Adjustment To Population Health

Of the four pillars of The Quadruple Aim, Population Health requires the greatest adaptation on the part of the BHC accustomed to carrying a caseload of patients. Rather than asking “How is *my* patient doing?” the clinical supervisor teaches the BHC to look at the entire population of patients who call that clinic *their* medical home and ask, “What percentage of *our* patients are depressed, getting treatment and improving?” Thus, the clinical supervisor teaches population health concepts by first teaching about Integrated Behavioral Health, then about the particular model being implemented, and then clinical and operational standards and procedures. For example, BHCs will need to first learn about visit lengths, number of patients seen, periodicity, target populations, and expectations about an episode of treatment. Next, the BHC learns to adapt brief modalities (Motivational Interviewing, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Solution Focused Therapy, Dialectical Behavior Therapy and Problem Solving Therapy) to the setting and patient population. As these skills and methods are being mastered, the clinical supervisor monitors adherence and efficacy.

Metrics and Tracking

Clinical supervisors may be the first ones to introduce the BHC to the concepts of universal screening and “treating to target.” They demonstrate the tools used to screen patients needing further assessment and to monitor progress in symptom reduction. They also help BHCs establish tracking and monitoring systems that ensure that patients receive a complete episode of care, despite the fact that weekly visits are impossible to schedule. Caring for this high volume of patients, with new patients being assessed and starting treatment every day, requires excellent organizational skills and systems to facilitate memory of specific details about a high

volume of patients. If a BHC sees three new and four follow-up patients a day, and sees follow-up patients every two weeks, for an average of three follow-up visits, the BHC would be tracking 140 patients with complex symptoms each month. The supervisor, therefore, helps the BHC monitor this high volume of patients, many of whom may be experiencing severe symptoms. Thus, both the BHC and the clinical supervisor need especially good tracking systems, especially BHCs are monitoring many high-risk patients.

Triage

Caring for an entire population requires constant triage in order to determine how one patient's severity compares with that of another. While a BHC is visiting with one patient, another patient may require immediate assessment. Significant symptoms of a moderate depression will wait while the suicidal patient is treated first. The clinical supervisor helps develop clear triage guidelines and helps both the BHCs and Primary Care Providers (PCPs) utilize the triage criteria effectively. There is often a direct trade-off between PCP and BHC time: If the PCP provides some assessment to determine level of acuity and how a patient should be triaged, that slows them down. Conversely, having the BHC determine the level of need slows down access to care. Just as with medical visits, there is an important trade-off between same day visits and access to follow-up appointments. The correct approach to triage depends on the model, clinic culture, population, and ratio of PCPs to BHCs. Finding the ideal approach reduces role strain and understaffing in both specialties increases it. The clinical supervisor can play a key role in finding and establishing the appropriate system for meeting the clinic's goals.

Safety and Safety Planning

Through hiring, training, performance improvement, and oversight, the clinical supervisor is responsible for the quality of care provided by the behavioral health staff. They review where quality improvement is necessary. During the process of consultation, the clinical supervisor may provide direction or even become directly involved in high-risk situations that require safety planning and monitoring. During safety planning, the clinical supervisor helps BHCs weigh competing alternatives in safety planning or conflicting ethical mandates. In the case of unlicensed BHCs, the clinical supervisor holds the clinical risk when supporting these BHCs in the management of suicidal and/or homicidal patients. When acute symptoms resolve, the supervisors continue to hold the responsibility for ongoing care. They ultimately are responsible for the management of the high-risk patients amongst the entire patient population of their supervisees.

The Second Aim: Enhancing the Patient Experience

Clinical supervision also focuses on the second aim: patient experience. The clinical supervisor's key role is to support the BHC in providing patient-centered care from both operational and clinical perspectives. Operationally, the supervisor promotes good access and appropriate triage. Clinically, the supervisor supports the BHC in all aspects of a "cycle of caring"—which cycles through empathic connection, active involvement, and conscious termination (Skovholt, 2001). One of the most challenging skills for BHCs practicing in primary care is juggling the high numbers of patients needing care. This requires continuous re-engagement with new patients who have complex, challenging or even overwhelming circumstances. Skovholt states that losing the capacity to care poses a great danger to patients because it results in provider ineffectiveness and incompetence. Caring is the essential quality that must be maintained. Awareness of this cycle enables the BHC to empathically re-engage over and over again. The clinical supervisor stays attuned to the BHC's ability to engage in the cycle and promotes the clinician's resilience.

The clinical supervisor helps BHCs develop and maintain approaches that support positive patient experiences for all patients. The clinical supervisor assists the BHC in working across cultures by maintaining curiosity, checking for bias, modeling empathy and cultural humility. The BHC may also be a bridge to PCPs and a

patient advocate: “Let’s talk to your medical provider about that.” The supervisor helps maintain a strength-based orientation in the context of the medical model, which typically focuses on symptoms or problems. They help ensure that the patient has both “voice” and “choice” in the treatment. By ensuring that BHCs are attuned, humble, and compassionate, the clinical supervisor helps BHCs keep the patient experience central. This aim is perhaps the one most congruent with the BHCs own training, and may be easiest for the BHC to uphold. But the challenge for the BHC is to not just to track and monitor one patient’s experience, but also the whole population.

In California, behavioral health care delivery covered by public insurance is bifurcated. Patients with mild-to-moderate symptoms have coverage through county health plans, and those with severe symptoms with higher levels of impairment such as severe and persistent mental illness receive care through the behavioral health care delivery system. People, however, do not fit neatly nor continuously into just one category, but rather may move back and forth between them. The BHC cares for patients who are often caught between the two systems of care. The role of the clinical supervisor is to help BHCs and PCPs collaborate effectively in order to help patients access care. The BHCs advocate, monitor, and support patients who need to access the right level of care. Most importantly, for several reasons, they often continue to provide care for patients who require a higher level of care than what can be provided in primary care. Patients may not want to transfer care because they feel comfortable in their medical home, because they have had a bad experience with county services, because of the stigma of care at the county or because they’ve come to trust the BHC.

While the current structure of behavioral health care for those with public insurance does not acknowledge the patient experience, the BHC does. Whether they are helping patients who come close to needing emergency care and psychiatric hospitalization, on the one hand, or whether they are monitoring patients who they are trying to refer to a higher level of care (or anywhere in between), the BHC cares for patients that need more care than primary care is designed for. In counties where access to specialty behavioral health is limited, the BHC can be monitoring many patients with active suicidality or other risk factors simultaneously. The clinical supervisor provides strategies for continued monitoring and assessment and encourages transfer of care when possible, ever mindful of the patient experience.

The Third Aim: Reducing Cost per Capita

Clinical Efficiency and Efficacy

Clinical supervisors play a key role in maximizing revenue and reducing costs. They do this through influence and input at both the clinical and operational levels. Excellent clinical skills inform the efficiency of care without detracting from quality. Clinical supervisors help BHCs to develop the skills to triage and assess quickly. They also teach the BHC how to make brief sessions effective and therapeutic by teaching about agenda setting, topic selection, empathic re-direction, and by focusing on discrete action steps. They also help BHCs engage patients in effective management of their chronic and/or complex conditions, including co-morbidities, in order to reduce the need for more expensive care. An example of this is the extensive monitoring the BHC provides to prevent patients from seeking care from Emergency Departments.

Clinical supervisors facilitate the implementation of group treatment because it is effective, reduces isolation and improves access, and also because it reduces the per capita cost of care. Not only does group treatment allow for more than one patient to receive care and therefore generate revenue simultaneously, but it also provides an efficient way to deliver non-billable services, thus reducing the number of non-revenue generating IBH appointments. The clinical supervisor teaches clinicians how to run groups if they don’t have prior training, helps implement them at their clinics, and then supports the clinicians in managing the clinical and operational challenges that inevitably arise.

In addition to increasing revenue through maximizing the number of patients seen, or through group treatment, clinical supervisors also facilitate the conversion of non-licensed clinicians to licensed clinicians. Through tutelage and assistance, clinical supervisors overseeing non-licensed BHCs influence the overall licensure exam pass rate among BHCs at a given clinic. The conversion of unlicensed BHCs to licensed ones has multiple fiscal benefits. The licensed BHCs generate revenue, require less oversight, and are able to see more patients. Finally, an attuned clinical supervisor can increase the retention of BHCs and thereby reduce expenditures related to staff turnover.

The Intersection of Clinical and Operational Factors

Supervisors help BHCs maintain a systems perspective in all aspect of their work, including helping the BHCs understand their role in cost effective care by identifying their role in keeping schedules full, replacing no-shows, reducing wait time, optimizing appointment length, billing appropriately, running groups, and targeting specific sub-populations for intervention. Clinical supervisors help develop the systems and algorithms that can identify and address targeted populations to meet their needs in a more cost effective manner. For example, patients who are “high utilizers” because of their underlying psychiatric needs will benefit from more intensive attention from BHCs, often lowering medical utilization.

In order to maximize schedules, the clinical supervisor introduces the BHC to “tetrising” the schedule, shortening or lengthening appointments so that more appointments can fit in. The BHC needs guidance and encouragement to view the schedule as a guide, rather than an accurate prediction. The clinical supervisor brings the operational perspective to the BHC, and conversely, learns about operational issues to bring to leadership. For example, when no-show rates are related to not being able to cancel appointments by phone, or if the automated reminders are not reaching patients with IBH appointments, operational solutions are required.

The Fourth Aim: Improving the Provider Experience

The Behavioral Health Clinician's Experience

BHCs need support and assistance in making a full adaptation to primary care behavioral health and to The Quadruple Aim. The clinical supervisor almost singlehandedly makes this adaptation possible. Even after that adaptation, the clinical supervisor has an almost singular impact on the experience of the BHCs. Clinical supervisors must be “bicultural” and able to translate and even interpret behavioral health concerns to PCPs and healthcare system issues to BHCs. The medical model is challenging for BHCs. The medical model identifies problems or symptoms that suggest a diagnosis and its corresponding treatment. In contrast, BHCs have been trained to build upon patients' strengths and their innate resilience to their presenting concerns. The clinical supervisor helps the BHC bridge the paradigms by providing empathic, strength-based strategies that are relevant. The clinical supervisor also provides essential emotional support to help refuel the BHC in assisting patients in need. This support may come in the form of encouragement, validation, and/or recognition. They encourage the BHC to engage in more self-care activities, to strengthen their work-life balance, or to engage in continuing education to increase effectiveness.

Vicarious Trauma

Emotional support is particularly needed in settings where the incidence of trauma is high. In the safety net, patients have few resources and bring their experience of trauma to their PCPs – either through chronic diseases (Felitti et al., 1998), somatic symptoms, psychological symptoms or through direct disclosures of recent or historic traumatic events. The PCPs “hand-off” the psychological trauma to the BHCs who hear the details

and experience the patient's full affect session after session. The BHC often listens to the traumas experienced by the patient – the rape or assault by a family member, coyote, neighbor or stranger. Often these traumas are plural rather than singular. Over time, BHCs are exposed to significant levels of trauma.

This chronic exposure may result in vicarious trauma symptoms for the BHC: flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, nightmares, depression, numbing, dissociation or avoidance. Judith Herman states, "no one can face trauma alone." She goes on to say: "If a therapist finds herself isolated in her professional practice, she should discontinue working with traumatized patients until she has secured an adequate support system."¹¹ In this context, the clinical supervisor's role in preventing vicarious trauma is paramount. Clinical supervisors create a safe space to discuss the supervisee's emotions related to patient trauma and serve as a buffer against vicarious trauma. They help support the BHC's resilience by listening empathically, encouraging self-care, providing perspective, and focusing on patient strengths. They encourage the BHCs to stay connected to their own strengths and support systems. The structure and regularity of clinical supervision – a forum to vent, problem-solve or receive emotional support – is essential to making the work sustainable.

The Primary Care Provider's Experience

The Quadruple Aim posits that primary care is burning out PCPs, thus threatening affordable, high quality, health care delivery. PCP satisfaction improves when BHCs are available to address the behavioral health needs of their patients, which, when unaddressed, create significant stressors for PCPs. When PCPs can identify behavioral health conditions and then hand off or refer to a team member, they can focus on addressing the medical condition. They avoid opening an emotional Pandora's Box, and thereby feel that they have responded to an important need. PCPs also learn essential skills either through collaboration or through more direct training provided by BHCs. Helping a patient manage their own symptoms – panic, anxiety, trauma, and mood – becomes a shared responsibility. The clinical supervisor not only improves the skill level of the BHC but also models how to bring this expertise forward to the PCPs. However, Integrated Behavioral Health can be both a stressor and a salvation for PCPs. For the PCPs, working with the BHCs can be another stressor – one more task to remember or manage. The clinical supervisor can serve as a bridge by advocating for simple systems that strengthen rather than erode collaboration.

The PCPs are not the only ones stretched thin. With the integration of behavioral health into primary care, the medical model impacts behavioral health care. The pressures experienced by PCPs are now being extended to BHCs who, like PCPs, are at increased risk of burnout (E. Horevitz, Personal Communication, 2016). BHCs can be stretched by the demand for high volumes as well. IBH programs are well advised to not replicate the factors that lead to burnout in PCPs. At the same time, PCPs would be well advised to learn from the experience of BHCs about the importance of clinical supervision. One can imagine the benefit that PCPs would gain from a regularly scheduled meeting to receive empathic support, training, and guidance, during which one could engage with a mentor to receive guidance, to reflect and to problem-solve. One bi-weekly hour focused on the provider's experience would go a long way in providing essential emotional support to PCPs.

The Clinical Supervisor Promotes Collaboration between PCP and BHC

When PCPs and BHCs collaborate in positive and productive ways, their respective experiences improve. Treatment planning for both disciplines improves with input from the other. Interdisciplinary work also contributes to the experience of providing "whole person care." Given that primary care is the de facto provider for the majority of behavioral health conditions and lifestyle factors figure prominently in chronic disease management, PCPs have significant experience with behavioral health and are appreciative of the ability to refer to BHCs. When patients are shared, collaboration results in better care, decreases isolation and increases the PCP's sense of efficacy. Yet, in an under-resourced environment, the interdisciplinary work can be stressful

and can result in an erosion of empathy between medical providers and behavioral health clinicians. In the safety net, expectations on both BHCs and PCPs are high, and primary care is difficult for each, though for different reasons. The BHC may see 7 patients impacted by poverty, trauma or other psychosocial stressors or psychiatric conditions, whereas the PCP may see 18 patients with complex co-morbidities. In the moment, the BHC may or may not see the intensity of the work of the PCP - the long hours, the call, the patient complexity or the life and death responsibility. The PCP may or may not see the invisible hours of monitoring high-risk patients, working with families, or trying to link patients to scarce community resources. From this vantage point, conflict is over-determined. The clinical supervisor can help each PCPs and BHCs maintain their empathy for the other.

Difficulties with collaboration can also result from stylistic differences between the medical and behavioral health disciplines. PCPs may speak in bullet points and BHCs may speak in paragraph. They use words like “explore” and “curious.” In this context, the clinical supervisor helps the BHC “cut to the chase.” PCPs diagnose a problem in order to treat it. BHCs identify the strength in order to promote it. The clinical supervisor is a translator who understands the BHCs’ training, understands and appreciates the BHC’s adaptations, large and small, to primary care and to population health. They interpret and may even buffer the actions and behaviors of PCPs. Where there is role strain, conflict or confusion, the supervisor advocates for PCPs to BHCs, and to BHCs on behalf of PCPs. This is important yet often invisible work.

Clinical supervisors support BHCs who feel the direct impact of lack of organizational alignment: the patient prescribed a benzodiazepine or SSRI without a behavioral health assessment and intervention; the patient with chronic nightmares not evaluated for PTSD; or the patient with acute pain struggling to adjust, would all benefit from both behavioral health assessment and intervention as early as possible in their treatment. BHCs may be asked to provide more treatment while they are being asked to shorten their visit lengths. They may be asked to take warm handoffs while they are managing actively suicidal patients. Or, they may be asked to reduce the number of patients they see while the number of referrals from providers is down due to PCP vacations or vacancies. The clinical supervisor attends to themes that emerge and works to identify the root cause.

To further improve the collaboration between PCP and BHC, the clinical supervisor promotes the establishment of clear definitions about role and scope. On the one hand, some PCPs have unreasonable expectations of BHCs to solve overwhelming challenges such as unemployment or homelessness. An example of this is a referral documented in the medical record for the true but challenging reason that the patient “needs a job.” Needs on this scale are better left to community partnerships. On the other hand, PCPs may at times inadvertently minimize the breadth and depth of the behavioral health skill set by intimating that it is a subset of their own knowledge base. PCPs may say that they could do the work of the BHC but they “just don’t have the time,” even though they lack training in psychopathology or evidence-based psychotherapies (E. Morrison, presentation to the Community Health Center Network, 2013). Of course, PCPs may consistently utilize skills that are shared by the disciplines, such as engagement, empathy and communication skills, and be able to provide psychoeducation effectively. An increasing number of PCPs have skill in Motivational Interviewing. Yet, it is unlikely that the PCP has also been trained in psychopathology, and possesses skills in the treatment modalities of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, and Problem Solving Therapy, *and* can apply this knowledge quickly and differentially. This is the unique behavioral health skill set that leads to the improvement in clinical outcomes even among the most vulnerable populations. Both of these misunderstandings – overestimating what the BHC can do to resolve patients’ social and economic issues or minimizing the breadth of their specific skill set gained after years of training – detract from the BHC’s experience. The clinical supervisor plays a key role in resolving these misunderstandings.

The Clinical Supervisor: Unsung Hero of The Quadruple Aim

The Supervisor's Experience

The emotional challenge of the role of the clinical supervisor is enormous. First, the clinical supervisor often feels like the “middle man.” Whereas in traditional settings, the clinical supervisor always protects the confidentiality of the supervisee, in primary care the clinical supervisor has broader allegiances. Confidentiality causes role strain for the supervisor. In the course of their partnership, the BHC shares private concerns with the clinical supervisor, and these may be relevant to the agency as a whole. For example, a clinical supervisor knows a BHC is thinking of looking for other work, but a prospective departure is relevant to other staffing or budgetary decisions. Or, the supervisor knows about difficulty between a PCP and a BHC, but the BHC is not ready to take any action. Like any supervisor, the clinical supervisor is often in the position to communicate agency-wide leadership decisions including those that could be unpopular with the BHCs. Performance evaluation creates another potential source of tension between the need to create a safe and trusting relationship with the BHCs while also holding them accountable. While this tension exists in traditional supervision when the supervisor works for an agency, the tensions are increased in primary care where the focus is not only on the individual patient but also on The Quadruple Aim.

Most importantly, the clinical supervisor, more than any other individual, is directly impacted by the incidence of trauma experienced by the patient population agency-wide. While the BHC hears about trauma among their own patients, that number is multiplied for the clinical supervisor, who hears about the traumas among the patients seen by all their supervisees. If a supervisor supervises 5 BHCs, and each week they each discuss 1 patient's traumatic event and its emotional aftermath, and they touch upon the raw emotions evoked in themselves, the supervisor hears about and experiences the impact of 100 traumas a month, not only on the patient but on the BHCs themselves. In most safety net settings, one trauma per supervisee a week underestimates the incidence of trauma. Placing this aspect of the work in the context of The Quadruple Aim, the role of clinical supervisor is even more challenging. Attention to all four aims requires a unique combination of empathy, clinical knowledge, pragmatism, business acumen, flexibility, professional maturity, and resilience. The clinical supervisor experiences the BHC's emotional overwhelm or fatigue, and therefore is vulnerable to burnout because of the sheer quantity and severity of the patients cared for by their supervisees. A key question becomes how to make the work of the clinical supervisor sustainable.

Supporting the Clinical Supervisor

Primary care settings integrating BHCs into the care team can support the clinical supervisor, and by extension, The Quadruple Aim, in several ways. The first step is to limit the number of clinical supervisees in order to limit the supervisor's exposure to vicarious trauma. Second, involving the clinical supervisor in the alignment of expectations regarding the role and scope of the BHC will improve both PCP and BHC experience. Third, investing in the time to develop agency-wide agreements about target populations, interruptions, warm handoffs, and urgent visits; onboarding all new staff in alignment with these agreements; and then ensuring the implementation of these agreements would strengthen relationships and increase coordination and efficiency. These changes would allow for increased attention toward clinical matters that in turn would help clinical supervisors develop and experience mastery in their work.

Engaging BHCs to teach brief behavioral skills that PCPs can use with their patients would create a uniform language and improve collaboration between PCPs and IBH. Brief teaching on Motivational Interviewing would help PCPs prepare patients for behavior change. Solution-Focused strategies would build on small islands of successes. Mindfulness training would help PCPs manage broad range of clinical symptoms. BHCs can also teach how to communicate their empathy. While empathy is a feeling that many health care providers experience, communicating empathy is a skill many behavioral health clinicians hone in graduate training.

Like PCPs and BHCs, clinical supervisors need opportunities for renewal. These could include program development, planning, and even teaching clinical supervision. They have a unique perspective on interdisciplinary collaboration in primary care and should be tapped not only for contributing to performance improvement efforts throughout the primary care enterprise but for leadership opportunities as well.

Conclusion

Truly integrated care can't meet The Quadruple Aim without the contribution of the breadth and depth of clinical supervisors. They must be able to work in primary care settings; have knowledge of systems, organizations and operations; and understand psychopathology and evidence-based practices. The clinical supervisor must possess not only broad and deep clinical skill, but also emotional intelligence and interpersonal skill. They are at once an ally, coach, boss, mentor, and teacher. Given the fast-paced primary care environment, the diversity of clinical presentations, and the varied personalities and expectations of PCPs, the clinical supervisor models resilience and empathy. A strong clinical supervisor is an essential, but undervalued resource.

Given the centrality of the clinical supervisor to The Quadruple Aim, further attention to the development of competencies and strategies to develop them are needed. Furthermore, the role of clinical supervisor will likely increase in importance to The Quadruple Aim as primary care moves away from the fee-for-service model and towards alternative payment strategies. As the care team expands to include not only BHCs but also panel managers, medical assistants, community outreach workers, health educators, and case managers, the need for different levels of clinical supervision will also expand. Each role on the care team will benefit from behavioral health training and clinical consultation and/or oversight by a clinical supervisor. The Quadruple Aim posits that PCPs need care themselves to continue providing care. And so does the clinical supervisor whose role is worthy of recognition, investment and elevation.

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