

Health Policy Newsletter

Volume 12 Number 2

June, 1999

Article 6

A Geriatric Mental Health Network for JHS Long Term Care Facilities

Joan G. Grasso, MS *

* Belmont Behavioral Health

Copyright ©1999 by the author. *Health Policy Newsletter* is a tri-annual publication of the Thomas Jefferson University/Jefferson Health System Department of Health Policy, 1015 Walnut Street, Suite 621, Philadelphia, PA 19107.

Suggested Citation:

Grasso JG. A geriatric mental health network for JHS long term care facilities. *Health Policy Newsletter* 1999; 12(2): Article 6. Retrieved [date] from <http://jdc.jefferson.edu/hpn/vol12/iss2/6>.

A Geriatric Mental Health Network for JHS Long Term Care Facilities

One of the priorities of the Jefferson Health System (JHS) Senior Health Initiative is to provide coordinated behavioral health services to seniors who reside in long-term care (LTC) facilities affiliated with the partners of the JHS. JHS Senior Health anticipates that the delivery of appropriate and efficient outpatient behavioral health treatment modalities will effectively reduce the number of inpatient admissions and subsequent disruptions in placement for seniors. Achieving this goal requires the collaboration of the multiple providers of geropsychiatry services throughout the JHS, and their collective expertise, toward the establishment of a LTC mental health network for the system.

The importance of behavioral health services for seniors in LTC has been clearly articulated by LTC facility administrators, direct caregivers, families, and attending physicians. In addition, the quality of life for seniors residing in LTC—who are at risk for short or long-term behavioral health problems—has been shown to be enhanced by the comprehensive range of services provided in LTC facilities, including effective diagnosis and assessment, individual and/or group therapies, family/staff education, participation in partial hospitalization/intensive outpatient programs, and effective medication management.

The geriatric behavioral health services of the JHS are a component of the Jefferson Behavioral Health Network (see September 1998 issue [Vol. 113] of the Health Policy Newsletter, "Jefferson Behavioral Health Network A Multidisciplinary Approach to Mental Health Management"). The goals attendant with creating a geriatric mental health network—providing timely, responsive, and cost-effective behavioral health services across diverse settings (assisted living, nursing home, community agency), require flexibility, to better insure that the service procedures accommodate the specific needs of a given site. Yet there can be little flexibility in the JHS goal to set and maintain the standard of providing the highest quality of care for seniors who are the customers of the JHS providers in the program, including geriatric psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical nurse specialists, and social workers.

The network is in the developmental and early implementation stages. The service delivery process begins with a LTC facility requesting behavioral health services, at which point a site visit and a needs assessment is done by the author. A clinical team of treatment providers, drawn from available geriatric behavioral health staff throughout the JHS, is then identified to provide coverage at the site. As the program moves forward, effort is being made to match closely the team of practitioners with the care site to assure optimal continuity of care, communication with site staff and family, and effective integration with physical health services. Within the next year, the geriatric mental health network plans to expand programming by adding more behavioral health wellness and screening strategies in the LTC facilities. An outcome measurement tool will also be developed and implemented. The provision of geriatric behavioral health services, via a "mental health network," to the partners of JHS long-term care facilities promises to be a timely and cost-effective response to the mental health care needs of seniors in our system. For more information about the geriatric mental health network, please contact Joan Grasso at 215-581-3713.

Joan G. Grasso: A Geriatric Mental Health Network for JHS Long Term Care Facilities

About the Author

Joan G. Grasso, MS, is Director of Consultation Services at Belmont Behavioral Health.