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Jefferson Behavioral Health Network: A Multi-System Approach to Mental Health Management

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Jefferson Behavioral Health Network: A Multi-System Approach to Mental Health Management

The newly created Jefferson Behavioral Health Network (JBHN) was developed as the mental health and chemical dependency "carve-out" arm of the Jefferson Health System. In relatively mature markets, like Philadelphia's, we have seen an acceleration in the development of large integrated delivery networks (IDN's) similar to the Jefferson Health System (JHS). They have formed their own carve-out behavioral health companies to control costs by appropriately managing a subscriber's entire mental health and/or chemical dependency experience.

In our region, mergers and affiliations between health insurers, community providers, physicians and hospitals have been the driving force behind a dramatic growth in the scope and geographic coverage of these new provider-sponsored IDN's. This has led to a shift in services planning from a local basis to planning for much broader, regional service areas. The formation of JBHN is reflective of this trend. This partnership constitutes one of the region's most comprehensive mental health and chemical dependency networks, with over 500 inpatient mental health and chemical dependency beds in 12 different facilities, and 20 partial hospitalization programs.

JBHN recognizes the importance of creating a tight interface, as part of a seamless care delivery system, between behavioral health care management and the primary care physician's office, where a significant amount of treatment and early identification of mental illness and chemical dependency occurs. This interface is key to early identification and treatment of potentially deleterious and costly psychiatric problems. (Please refer to the article by Yuen in this issue of this Newsletter, "Linkages Between Primary Care Providers and Mental Health Specialists.") JBHN's management of its current patient population (approximately 80,000 lives) is predicated on an effective case management approach which incorporates early identification of potentially problematic cases coupled with ongoing communication between JBHN's team of care managers and the treating therapist. For patients who require less intense outpatient treatment only, therapists are available in a multitude of accessible locations. Additional therapists from throughout the 21 counties surrounding Philadelphia have been invited to join the JBHN provider panel, joining those clinicians who are either employed by or are affiliated with a JBHN owner/partner facilities. At present, JBHN is referring clients to over 200 care providers, comprising psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed social workers and certified psychiatric nurse specialists.

Consistent with the growth strategy of the JHS, JBHN has attempted to position itself as a formidable mental health and chemical dependency provider in the Southeastern Pennsylvania market. As such it is striving to achieve the goals of a successful carve-out system: a continuum of care, coupled with effective management of a defined population of subscribers (through the use of comprehensive protocols that assign patients to the appropriate level of care); internal coordination; the ability to rapidly move patients through the various levels of care; and the effective use of non-physician care providers who promote a "brief therapy" approach to treatment. Most important among these is the system's ability to maintain, enhance and measure the quality of services provided. A key initiative

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of JBHN is the establishment of informal relationships between mental health clinicians and JHS owned and/or affiliated primary care offices. Such "informal" relationships may involve, for example, the placement of a therapist directly in a busy practice for a pre-defined number of hours each week.

Convenient access to care, and a comprehensive understanding of the services and value provided by behavioral health intervention, are important factors in building a productive and cost-effective relationship between our primary care and mental healthcare delivery systems.

For further information about JBHN call: Verna Pomar, Provider Relations Representative at 1-800-550-5491.

About the Author

Jack Dembow is Vice President of the Jefferson Health System, Division of Behavioral Health, and Executive Director of the Jefferson Behavioral Health Network.