Transforming Emergency Departments through Telepsychiatry

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention[1], approximately 4.9 million people seeking care in emergency departments (ED) across the country have a primary diagnosis related to a mental or behavioral health condition. These psychiatric patients deserve access to prompt, high-quality care but may find that hospitals and health systems are not always equipped with adequate staffing or resources to help these patients receive the care they need. This can lead to psychiatric boarding, unnecessary admissions, and frequent revisits or readmissions.

Many health systems face their own set of challenges. The Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project reports that mental and substance use disorder ED visits experienced service delivery costs of more than $5.6 billion, representing more than 7% of the $76.3 billion total in ED visit costs[2]. Telepsychiatry can bridge the gaps in high costs for health systems and access to high-quality psychiatric care for patients.

Telepsychiatry is a virtual care behavioral health solution that aids health systems to provide timely care to psychiatric patients, while increasing throughput for their EDs. When a health system implements telepsychiatry in their ED, they receive a dedicated team of physicians 24/7, 365 days per year to make managing inpatient psychiatric care more seamless. This translates to increased ED and inpatient throughput, lower lengths of stay, and timely psychiatric evaluations that improve provider and patient satisfaction.

There are several benefits of telepsychiatry in the ED. They include:
1. Improved ED throughput for behavioral health patients:
   - ✓ 62% reduction in time spent in ED, improving throughput by 150 minutes per patient[3]
   - ✓ 55% shorter ED wait times increases the total number of patients seen in the ED[4]

2. Lower hospital admission rates for patients who receive ED telepsychiatry
   - ✓ 5% reduction in inpatient admissions[5]

3. Greater access to specialized behavioral health care improves discharge planning and lowers revisit rates
   - ✓ 36% lower all cause revisit rate within 90 days[6]

4. Increased ED staff and physician satisfaction

✓ Leveraging telepsychiatry for ED coverage reduces stress of your on-site ED providers and enables them to focus on the patients they can help the most.

Effective care requires longitudinal access to healthcare for patients. Telepsychiatry can ensure patients receive timely access to quality care, whether they arrive through ED doors or are referred from primary care physicians. Telepsychiatry can facilitate a seamless process for providers, patients, hospitals, and health systems. Fortunately, initiating a telepsychiatry consult is akin to calling any other consult in to the ED. With virtual access to a psychiatric consult, providers can offer a more comfortable, high-quality, and efficient ED experience for patients experiencing critical mental health conditions.

Your patients deserve the very best, and telepsychiatry shows them just how much you care. Sources:

[1] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, September 6). FastStats – Mental Health. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved January 23, 2023, from https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/mental-health.htm

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