

Recommendation 3c

Where inpatient acute beds for behavioral health patients are not available in a region, hospital leaders should seek governmental assistance that would allow hospitals to collaborate across multiple institutions in order to develop needed regional inpatient behavioral health services.

Hospital and Counties Improve Emergency Inpatient Mental Health Services

Community Memorial Hospital - Winona Health, Winona, Minnesota

Summary

Four years ago, Community Memorial Hospital entered into an agreement with the County Human Services Agencies for three contiguous counties (Winona, Houston, and Wabasha), to share the cost of on-call psychiatry time. Without this cost sharing arrangement, the hospital would not be able to have a psychiatrist on-call on a 24/7 basis. Having a psychiatrist on call 24/7 enables the hospital to evaluate, triage, and when necessary admit patients from the three county area to the hospital. Thus keeping patients in need of inpatient psychiatric care within their home or neighboring community. Otherwise, the nearest facilities that would be able to consider an admission, if not full and on diversion, are the Mayo Clinic 40 miles to the west in Rochester or Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center in LaCrosse, Wisconsin 30 miles south.

Community and Hospital

A rural community, Winona is an historic island city nestled between river bluffs that rise 500 feet above the Mississippi River. In 2006 the population of Winona County was estimated at 49,288, the median household income in this rural county is \$41,429, and 9.7 percent of the population lives below the poverty level. Houston and Wabasha Counties are also made up of rural communities. They have approximately half the number of residents as Winona County, a slightly higher median household income, and a little more than 6 percent of their populations live below the poverty level.

Community Memorial Hospital is part of the Winona Health System, a community owned and operated nonprofit health care system. It is comprised of a 99-bed community hospital and a 154-bed nursing home. On January 1st of this year, Winona Health merged with the Winona Clinic physician group. The hospital, which can trace its history to the late 1800s, has consistently grown to meet the expanding health care needs of residents of Winona and surrounding communities.

Program Overview

The state of Minnesota's Department of Human Services has been increasing its support of community-based mental health care services. Thus the three counties in this collaborative effort are fairly rich in behavioral health support services. Community Memorial Hospital is, however, the only hospital in the three county area that provides an inpatient psychiatric unit. Its 11-bed secure inpatient psychiatric unit offers treatment for those suffering from anxiety attacks, depression, suicidal thoughts, schizophrenia, psychosis, other behavioral health care problems, and for those in need of involuntary detoxification. The hospital also has a 24 hour-a-day Emergency Department (ED) staffed by dedicated physicians, registered nurses, support staff, and a cadre of on-call specialty physicians.

For patients thought to be in need of mental health care services this includes initial triage and assessment, acute psychiatric evaluation and stabilization, and referral to other levels of care including inpatient hospital admission.

For hospitalized patients, Community Memorial Hospital provides a consumer focused secure environment. An individual treatment plan, based on the patient's needs and evidence-based best practices, is established for all inpatients to help them realize their full potential. Services are provided by psychiatrists, licensed therapists, recreation therapists, social workers, and LPN and RN nursing staff.

In October of 2007 Minnesota established a bed tracking system that enables any emergency department in the State to find an open inpatient bed by means of an online state-operated Web site. This enables all hospitals in the state to refer patients to the nearest most appropriate facility for treatment. Since the implementation of the hospital bed tracking system Community Memorial has averaged 27 admissions per month, with better than 90 percent of the patients coming from Winona's service area and the remainder coming from the secondary service areas. The average length of stay is just under 6 days combining Medicare and non-Medicare patients.

The hospital's social services department will help uninsured patients seek Medical Assistance insurance coverage; and when patients are discharged, they make certain that they have a follow up plan that includes an appointment with a provider within a couple of weeks of discharge. They also collaborate with case managers to improve discharge coordination and reduce length of stay. For patients covered under publicly funded programs, their case managers will help them arrange for outpatient counseling as well as social services designed to enable patients to enhance stability, social competencies, personal and emotional adjustment, and independent living. These services may also include adult sheltered workshops and housing programs.

Program Impact

The state of Minnesota mandates that adults with serious and persistent mental health conditions, who are covered under publicly funded medical assistants programs be offered case management services designed to assist them with their ongoing medical treatment and their social services needs. Keeping patients within the community makes it more efficient for case managers to follow these patients through an episode of hospitalization and discharge planning. It also saves case managers considerable time that they might otherwise have to spend travelling to out of area hospitals to meet with their clients and plan the next step in the continuum of care.

This project has also reduced demand on law enforcement personnel that were formerly called upon to transport patients several miles out of the area for treatment.

Community Memorial Hospital is a significant contributor to the health and well being of the community – offering a wide range of outpatient behavioral health services including: mental health counseling, psychiatric and psychological evaluations, medication management, marriage and family therapy, parenting concerns, child/adolescent problems, and geriatric counseling. It also has arrangements with two local universities to help them with their behavioral health care services needs. For example, the outpatient behavioral health department holds one-hour open every two weeks in one of the psychiatrist's schedule just to be able to see a college student who is referred as needing a psychiatry visit. In Winona and the surrounding communities it generally takes 6 to 7 weeks to get an appointment for outpatient psychiatry.

Program Funding

Wanting to keep their residents close to home, the three participating County Human Services Agencies provide a total of \$150,000 annually to assist Community Memorial Hospital in providing a psychiatrist on-call 24/7. In Minnesota, counties are responsible for providing mental health care and other social services. The funds used to support the on-call psychiatrist come from county dollars and dollars that the State allocates to the counties for mental health care and human services. Payment for inpatient care is provided by private and public insurance programs. Because of the sometimes debilitating affects of persistent mental illness, a disproportionate number of patients with a serious mental illness are covered by Medicare or Medical Assistance programs. Approximately 67percent of revenue generated by the inpatient behavioral health unit comes from patients on Medicare and or Medical Assistance.

Obstacles or Challenges

There were no major obstacles in implementing this service system enhancement. The three counties Human Service agencies, and Community Memorial Hospital came together to provide a much needed service for their communities.

Success Factors

Provision of 24/7 psychiatric mental health service enables patients to remain close to family and familiar surroundings. Being in close proximity to their current support systems, opposed to hospitalization in other communities, assists patients in the recovery process.

Coordination of discharge care happens at the local level with and between service system professionals that know each other.

Providing mental health care services locally conserves resources the counties may have had to invest in transporting patients to facilities out of the area.

Lessons Learned and Advice to Others

This collaborative initiative between Community Memorial Hospital and Houston, Wabasha and Winona Counties demonstrates commitment to local level care for its residents. The cost of providing on-call psychiatry – to remain open for 24/7 admissions – is significant. However, there are also costs associated with not being open 24/7. One cost that isn't measured in dollars and cents is the toll this may have on families and friends. Receiving any type of health care close to where one lives is ideal. In the past, when the local health care system didn't have 24/7 psychiatric on-call coverage, people in need of psychiatric help had to be transported by family, a friend, or law enforcement to hospitals out of the service area when a psychiatrist wasn't available. People with mental illness become easily agitated, and an extended drive to an out of area facility may exacerbate their problem. This is difficult for the person struggling mental health problem and it is difficult for their family members. It also becomes difficult and costly to various providers in the local system. The cost of transporting a person is expensive, and transporting a person to another hospital does not necessarily guarantee an admission. Case and care management is not as fluid as it is on the local level. Case managers had to routinely drive hundreds of miles; and, if the person dealing with the mental health problem had legal issues, there could be even more transport need and costs by law enforcement.

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