



Integrating Physical and Behavioral Health at Yale New Haven Hospital

Yale New Haven Hospital improves patient outcomes and experience through behavioral and physical health integration.

Background

Behavioral health¹ disorders can increase the complexity of a patients' care and outcomes. At Yale New Haven Hospital (YNHH), a cutting-edge model brings behavioral health treatment to support medical teams before crises can arise.

In some YNHH settings, leaders say that more than 50% of patients presented with psychiatric and/or substance use conditions. In response, Yale leaders launched a Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) at Yale New Haven Psychiatric Hospital in 2012 and, in 2015, expanded the program across YNHH's medical and surgical units. Under this model, medical teams — including psychiatrists, nurse practitioners, advanced practice registered nurses, clinical nurse specialists and psychiatric social workers — collaborate to identify and address patients' behavioral health needs early in their care journey. Then, behavioral health specialists from the BIT liaison with patients and their medical teams to provide behavioral health interventions.

"Having behavioral specialists as part of the service and the team is critical," says Ariadna Forray, M.D., and associate professor of psychiatry; chief, psychological medicine section, psychiatry at NHH. "It's not like the traditional reactive consultative service; it's a whole-team approach."

As a result of these efforts, patients seen by the BIT had reduced lengths of stay, incurred fewer costs, and staff anecdotally reported a boost in their own job satisfaction.

YNHH's Approach

When a patient is admitted to a medical or surgical floor at YNHH, BIT team members screen that individual for psychiatric and substance use disorders. If the screening indicates a psychiatric or substance use diagnosis, clinicians integrate psychiatric care into the patient's plan.

Members of the BIT huddle with charge nurses on YNHH's medicine floors daily. The teams review whether behavioral health concerns are interfering with a patient's ability to receive medical treatment. If a behavioral health issue is present, the BIT team will engage with the patient to assess and treat their needs and develop a plan to continue behavioral health support post discharge.

Daily huddles and open lines of communication allow the BIT to be an important part of care for hospital patients with behavioral health disorders. By building relationships with providers on the medical teams and providing support for complex cases, the BIT generates buy-in across YNHH for the value of



¹ Behavioral health disorders include both mental illness and substance use disorders. Mental illnesses are specific, diagnosable disorders characterized by intense alterations in thinking, mood and/or behavior over time. Substance use disorders are conditions resulting from the inappropriate use of alcohol or drugs, including medications. Persons with behavioral health care needs may suffer from either or both types of conditions as well as physical co-morbidities.

integrating physical and behavioral health treatments to improve outcomes and reduce costs.

“We’re rounding as a team, just being there and becoming a part of the process,” says Paula Zimbreaan, M.D., associate professor of psychiatry; director, transplant psychiatry services at Yale New Haven Hospital. “Keeping track of some different, challenging cases and what interventions are successful — those are always very powerful stories that can help show the BIT program’s value.”

The BIT approach includes:

- Interventions and treatment for behavioral health disorder diagnoses
- A dedicated behavioral health specialist focused on addressing a patient’s behavioral health needs
- Visits with a social worker for the patient and their family
- Education and consultation with the medical team
- Recommendations and warm connections for post-discharge care
- Connections to resources for social needs (housing, food, transportation)

The BIT also serves as a hub of behavioral health expertise, assisting clinicians in developing workflows and aiding them in referring patients who require ongoing behavioral health care to other behavioral health experts.

Impact

Unaddressed behavioral health disorders can complicate or delay medically necessary care for patients, resulting in higher costs, longer length of stay and poorer patient outcomes. In 2016, YNHH

analyzed the costs and benefits of the BIT against the conventional consultant liaison approach over an 11-month period and found that patients seen by the BIT had reduced lengths of stay, lower costs, and the hospital was able to generate more revenue from new cases. For every dollar spent on the BIT, they **generated** a \$1.70 return². While YNHH leaders have not performed formal evaluations on other program benefits, anecdotal feedback from staff and patients indicates that patient and staff satisfaction improved under the BIT model.

“It’s really rewarding to see the Behavioral Health Innovation Team (BIT) empowering staff to take care of very difficult patients from a behavioral health standpoint.”

Paula Zimbreaan, M.D., associate professor of psychiatry; director, transplant psychiatry services at Yale New Haven Hospital

Relationships between the BIT and YNHH hospitalists also lead to more provider-to-provider support and education on the treatment and needs of patients with behavioral health conditions. “I do think that we have helped not just care for these patients, but destigmatized to some extent the care of psychiatric patients on these units,” says Furray. “Building these bridges and relationships leads to the better care of psychiatric

patients in general.”

Beyond financial benefits, the impact on medical teams is significant. “It’s really rewarding to see the BIT empowering staff to take care of very difficult patients from a behavioral health standpoint,” Zimbreaan says.

Next Steps

Currently, the BIT serves medical and surgical units across YNHH. The model is also gaining traction outside of the hospital. Hospitals across the country are undertaking their own efforts to replicate the BIT, and interest has also come in from providers in other countries.

2 Sledge WH, Bozzo J, White-McCullum BA, Lee H (2016) The Cost-Benefit from the Perspective of the Hospital of a Proactive Psychiatric Consultation Service on Inpatient General Medicine Services. Health Econ Outcome Res Open Access 2: 122. doi: 10.4172/2471-268x/1000122

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