Integrating Physical and Mental Health Care

By Mike Vizena

We often hear about mental health and physical health as if they were unrelated, two different ways of being healthy. But in recent years the correlation between the two has become more obvious and recognition of ways that each impacts the other is more prevalent.

Research finds that people who have mental health issues are at higher risk for physical health issues. According to the World Health Organization, people with severe mental health disorders on average have a 10-25 year reduction in lifespan, largely due to physical medical conditions including cardiovascular, respiratory and infectious diseases, as well as diabetes and hypertension.

Focusing on just physical or mental health is not sufficient, the foundation for building good overall health has evolved into the mind and body co-existing.

As a result, many mental health service providers are pairing with primary and other health care providers to integrate their services in order to enhance the quality of patient care.

In 2013, Centra Wellness Network in Michigan joined a coalition to increase integrated care for residents of Northern Michigan in partnership with providers of primary, mental, specialty health, substance abuse, public health and dental care. The effort aims to lower health care costs, improve the patient care experience and centralize mental health as a holistic focus.

Several of the coalition members relocated their offices to a shared space, allowing patients to seamlessly take care of multiple appointments in one visit. The shared waiting room also aids in combating the stigma that mental health consumers often face when seeking and receiving mental health services.

By transitioning from separate mental and physical health care services to the streamlining of both, services will become more efficient, helping patients maintain a balanced life that thoroughly encompasses the elements of physical and mental well-being.

Promoting individual well-being and a healthy lifestyle is a long-term investment. Focusing on the integration of mental and physical health will ensure that everyone receives the benefits of comprehensive care. To create a healthier future for all of us, we must start by integrating the care of our bodies and our minds.

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