North Carolina Statewide Telepsychiatry Program (NC-SteP): Using Telepsychiatry to Improve Access to Evidence-Based Care

Sy Ateaz Saeed, MD, FACPysch, Kalyan Muppayaravaru, MD, MPH, Katherine Jones, PhD, Ryan Baker, MHA

ABSTRACT
North Carolina Statewide Telepsychiatry program (NC-SteP) provides telepsychiatry services in hospital emergency departments to individuals experiencing an acute behavioral health crisis. The program has significantly reduced patient length of stay in emergency departments (EDs), provided cost savings to the health care delivery system through overturned involuntary commitments, and has achieved high rates of staff and provider satisfaction.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
NC-SteP utilizes telepsychiatry, which provides the patient with a face-to-face interaction with the provider through real-time video-conferencing technology. Videoconferencing is facilitated using mobile carts and desktop units. A web portal has been designed and implemented that combines scheduling, EMR, and data management systems.

RESULTS
• 41 hospitals in the network with 40 live
• 6 clinical provider hubs operational
• 49,643 telepsychiatry assessments completed as of September, 2021
• Average time from request to completed consult 3:43 (hr:mins)
• Total of 22,127 IVCs were reported of which 7,662 IVCs were overturned
• Of the ED patients who received telepsychiatry services, 41% were discharged to home and 45% were discharged to another facility.
• 33% of patients served were uninsured
• Median length of stay for all ED telepsychiatry patients was 25.8 hours
• 523 patients had a LOS longer than 300 hours (1.4%)
• Statewide telepsychiatry program is positioned well to create collaborative linkages and develop innovative models of mental health care:
  • EDs and hospitals
  • Community-based mental health providers
  • Primary care providers
  • FQHCs and public health centers

DISCUSSION
• NC-SteP is well positioned to create collaborative linkages and develop innovative models of mental health care: EDs and hospitals, community-based mental health providers, primary care providers, FQHCs and public health centers.

NEXT STEPS
• 25 community site clinics by end of 2022 (subject to funding)
• Continuous improvement of telecommunication methods and web based portal, linking hospitals and providers in sharing information for schedule of patient, exchange clinical data and support the administrative and billing functions
• Evidence based practices employing standardized treatment protocols

REFERENCES