

Abstract

Introduction: A large proportion of U.S. children and adolescents have a diagnosable mental illness yet, fewer than half receive the care they need, and one-third rely solely on their Primary Pediatric Care Physician (PPCP) to address these concerns. This study explored PPCP beliefs regarding the benefits and challenges of integration of BHCs into pediatric primary care.

Methods: This qualitative study was conducted at a Federally Qualified Health Center located at a large pediatric hospital in southern California. Ten PPCPs were interviewed.

Results: PPCPs highlighted that both patients and providers benefited from BHC collaboration. Several noted that collaborating with BHCs improved their own wellbeing. Barriers to collaboration included lack of BHC availability relative to patient load. PCPs expressed hesitation to engage in some behavioral health tasks without BHC support.

Conclusions: These interviews revealed that integrated care can be an important and effective component in addressing high rates of behavioral health concerns in children. BHCs were sometimes underutilized, and the data revealed factors which could enhance full collaboration and utilization. In addition, our data support IPC as an important component in addressing the epidemic of physician burnout.

Keywords: integrated care, primary care, behavioral health, physician perspectives, mental health

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