

PRACTICE ALERT!

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Comprehensive Behavioral Health Screening in Primary Care

On January 16, 2013, President Barack Obama directed Secretary Kathleen Sebelius of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Secretary Arne Duncan of the U.S. Department of Education to launch a [national conversation on behavioral health](#) to reduce the shame and secrecy associated with mental illness, encourage people to seek help if they are struggling with mental health problems, and encourage individuals whose friends or family are struggling to connect them to help. Behavioral health is a comprehensive term that includes treatment for conditions such as depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, social-emotional disorders, suicidal ideation, substance abuse, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and other mental health issues.

Behavioral health problems affect nearly every family. Yet as a nation, we continue to struggle to have an open and honest conversation about these issues. Primary care physicians are encouraged to use brief mental health screening measures with their patients, since many report symptoms of psychological distress and disorder. Regular screenings in primary care enables earlier identification of mental health and substance use disorders, which translates into earlier care.

Behavioral Health in Primary Care Checklist	Yes	No	Notes
Staff Training			
Have staff received risk assessment training that identifies specific characteristics of the individual served and environmental features that may exacerbate or improve behavioral health symptoms?			
Are staff knowledgeable about how to address the immediate behavioral health safety needs of the individual served?			
Are staff knowledgeable about the most appropriate setting for treatment of the individual served?			
Have staff received de-escalation training ?			
Have clinical protocols been revised and updated to ensure consistency with the American Psychiatric Association guidelines ?			

Behavioral Health in Primary Care Checklist	Yes	No	Notes
If immediate danger arises, is there a plan in place to keep other patients and staff safe?			
Have staff received training on issues related to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act privacy and security rules related to patient mental health information?			
Assessment/ Screening			
Are all patients being assessed for depression using a standardized screening tool for depression ?			
Are primary care providers prepared to discuss with patients any behavioral health concerns which may be detected through behavioral health screening assessments?			
Suicidal Ideation			
If the patient has expressed suicidal thoughts, has the staff asked if they have a suicide plan in place ?			
If the patient has expressed suicidal thoughts, has he or she disclosed information regarding any weapons with them onsite or at home?			
Is there a safe room onsite for patients who might need enhanced security to keep themselves and others safe?			
If a patient has expressed suicidal thoughts, is a trained staff member available to stay with the patient at all times while in the safe room?			
Does the facility have sufficient security to keep the behavioral health patient, other patients, and staff safe?			
Have all potentially dangerous objects (e.g., phone) been properly secured?			
When an individual at risk for suicide leaves the care of the organization, is a process in place to initiate and track referrals to additional care and services?			
When a vulnerable individual leaves the care of the organization, has the provider provided suicide prevention information (such as a crisis hotline) to the individual and his or her family?			

Behavioral Health in Primary Care Checklist	Yes	No	Notes
<i>Treatment and Follow-Up</i>			
Do you offer primary care providers continuing education on behavioral health issues?			
Is there a behavioral health consultant or referral source on the primary care team?			
If appropriate, is the primary care provider being involved in conversation regarding the patient's behavioral health care?			
Prior to prescribing psychiatric medications, has the patient received proper assessment through a comprehensive behavioral health examination ?			
Are psychiatric medications being properly prescribed and administered ?			
Has a process been established for the safe transport of a patient requiring a higher level of care?			
Have advanced directives been discussed with patients prior to initiation of behavioral healthcare or referral services?			
If the patient is not medically competent to complete an advanced directive, is there a process in place to designate a healthcare proxy to complete the form?			
Are patients provided with resources to address day-to-day issues as well as situations when the patient feels that he or she is in danger?			

Want to learn more about behavioral health patient safety? Refer to the [SAMHSA/HRSA Center for Integrated Health Solutions \(CIHS\)](#) website. Additionally, the [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#) provides several resources for providers related to assessing and treating patients at risk for suicide. Health centers and free clinics can also refer to the guidance article [Patient Suicide: Assessment and Prevention](#) and the sample tool [Patient Suicide Risk: Assessment and Evaluation](#) on the Clinical Risk Management Program website. Clinical Risk Management Program resources are provided for FREE by ECRI Institute on behalf of HRSA. Don't have access or want to attend a free, live demonstration of the website? E-mail Clinical_RM_Program@ecri.org or call (610) 825-6000 ext. 5200.

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