As a physician in private practice, you may worry that your patients' behavioral health care needs are going unmet.

“Why is that? It’s because of shortages in many communities of psychiatrists and other clinicians to address these needs,” said Kathleen Blake, MD, MPH, the AMA’s vice president of health care quality.

In addition to not having enough behavioral health professionals to meet patient demand, people with behavioral health conditions sometimes avoid care because of the stigma they associate with seeking these services.

Furthermore, some of the challenges physicians and patients face when addressing behavioral health conditions are the consequence of the longstanding artificial separation of behavioral health and physical health in the U.S. health care system. That is exacerbated by differences in coverage and payment that persists despite the passage of laws to ensure mental and physical health parity.

Acknowledging that reality, the AMA established the Behavioral Health Integration (BHI) Collaborative with seven other leading medical associations. The collaborative, which among other things has created the Overcoming Obstacles webinar series, supports physicians in overcoming obstacles to integrating behavioral and mental health care into their practices and helps them meet the needs of more patients.

The aim of the collaborative is that patients will receive mental health care that is coordinated by the primary care office or other physician specialist, whether in collaboration with a psychiatrist or other mental health professionals. Experience with this model has led to reports of greater professional satisfaction because of physician confidence that they are able to treat the whole patient.

Below, find seven steps to help integrate behavioral health care into your private practice and keep it going for the long haul.
Start the journey to integrate behavioral health into your private practice

The BHI Compendium is a one-stop online collection of resources designed to support you and your practice wherever you may be on your journey to integration. This tool continues the BHI Collaborative’s commitment to helping physicians overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of meeting their patients’ mental and behavioral health needs.

Learn how this private practice physician integrates behavioral health care

It’s been several years since family physician Karen L. Smith, MD, began screening her patients for depression and anxiety, as well as for alcohol- and substance-use disorders. Discover how behavioral health became a regular part of her North Carolina private solo practice, including her becoming certified to offer medication for addiction treatment services.

Dismantle stigma surrounding mental health conditions

Stigma persists for patients diagnosed with a mental health conditions, which may result in discrimination, feelings of shame and assignment of blame in ways that would never accompany a cancer diagnosis. Patients often experience stigma in their primary care physician’s office, too, even if it is unintentional. Learn the steps that private practice physicians can take—and resources they can access—to help overcome and eliminate the experience and effects of stigma.

Boost patients’ overall outcomes with BHI


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Integrating behavioral health care leads to better health and care for people with chronic diseases such as substance-use disorder, type 2 diabetes, hypertension and more. Learn how your private practice can use BHI to help manage, treat and address acute and chronic conditions.

Sustain behavioral health care in your primary care practice

With careful planning, integrating behavioral health and primary care services improves patient care and outcomes and can be financially sustainable for practices that rely on fee for service, value-based care payments, or some combination thereof.

Discover how to make behavioral health care more equitable

Three physicians on the front lines offered a number of ideas on how to support patients who need mental health care and what physicians can do now to help make equity part of their practices and how mental health professionals and primary care physicians can work together to provide coordinated, culturally informed and equitable care for patients no matter their race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Protect patients' privacy when integrating behavioral health care

Patient privacy can't be overlooked when integrating care. Discover the do's and don'ts of maintaining patient privacy, as there are many federal and state laws and regulations related to behavioral health information, and they are ever changing.

Get more great tips by tuning into upcoming entries in the BHI Collaborative Overcoming Obstacles webinar series, and dig into an archive of more than a dozen previous webinars covering topics as varied as pediatric behavioral health and coding for BHI.

It takes astute clinical judgement, effective collaboration with colleagues, and innovative problem-
solving to succeed in an independent setting that is often fluid, and the AMA offers the resources and support physicians need to both start and sustain success in private practice.

Find out more about the AMA Private Practice Physicians Section, which seeks to preserve the freedom, independence and integrity of private practice.