Use these new guides to help integrate behavioral health care

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Want to learn how your primary care practice—whether big or small, private or part of a health care system—can seamlessly integrate the screening and treatment of patients for suicide risk and substance use disorder into your current workflow? Or when and how to treat patients with psychotropic medications?

The AMA recently added four new practice guides to the Behavioral Health Integration (BHI) Compendium to help make it easier for you to wholistically treat your patients’ needs. They offer practical and actionable guidance for standardizing behavior health care screening and treatment in your practice. The Behavioral Health Integration Compendium is a one-stop online collection of resources from eight national physician organizations designed to help you no matter where you are on your integrated health care journey.

“For medical practices looking to accelerate behavioral health integration, particularly given the acute increases in psychological distress and trauma created during the COVID-19 pandemic, the trusted online resources offered by the BHI Compendium provide a proven path toward implementation and sustained success,” said AMA President Gerald E. Harmon, MD.

Here are four ways the new downloadable additions to the BHI Compendium can help you integrate behavioral health care into your primary care practice.

1 Design an effective workflow
No matter what your primary care office’s practice setting, staffing or overall financial considerations are, there are general sequences of actions you can adjust to fit your practice’s needs and available resources to integrate behavioral health care. The “BHI Workflow Guide” outlines key topics to consider, including staffing, protocols for crisis,
billing and coding, and more. It includes a “Warm Handoff Script” to help you introduce a patient to the integrated program and create a smooth transition of care between providers. The guide also provides sample workflows (PDF) and an editable plan (PDF) to help practices and systems create their own workflow that works best for them and their patients.

2 Identify and treat substance use or misuse

Substance use disorder increases the risk of patients developing other health conditions, but because there is still stigma associated with the disorder, patients may be reluctant to seek care. The “Substance Use Disorder How-to Guide” offers physician practices and health systems practical strategies, actionable steps, and evidence-based resources for identifying and addressing patients’ substance use or misuse. For example, it is important for health care organizations to establish an environment of trust and demonstrate a non-judgmental approach to recognizing SUD as a disease.

3 Prevent suicide in at-risk patients

More than 40% of patients contemplating suicide interact with their primary care physician within days of their death. But physicians and staff may be unprepared on how best to respond when a patient expresses suicidal ideation or behavior. The “Suicide Prevention How-to Guide” provides actional steps and evidence-based resources for physician practices and health systems to identify patients at-risk for suicide and connect them with the most appropriate treatment plan.

4 Prescribe psychotropic medications

The “Psychopharmacology How-to Guide” provides you with strategies and best practices for assessing when and how psychotropic medication is appropriate to prescribe for your patient. For example, creating space for patients to educate you and your team on their experiences not only empowers the patient in their recovery but helps to reduce potential stigma they may be feeling. The guide can also help you learn to evaluate the appropriateness of psychopharmacology and the patient’s willingness for treatment, implement a treatment plan, understand financial considerations and more.

The AMA established the BHI Collaborative with seven other leading medical associations to help physicians to create practices that are able to help treat the whole patient. Learn more with the URL: https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/use-these-new-guides-help-integrate-behavioral-health-care

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collaborative’s “Overcoming Obstacles” webinar series.