THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INSTITUTE AT HARBORVIEW MEDICAL CENTER

Harborview Medical Center - UW Medicine has created a new Center of Excellence with the Behavioral Health Institute (BHI) – where innovation, research and clinical practice come together to improve mental health and addiction treatment. The BHI is a group of services and people dedicated to key issues in behavioral health. Through the Institute, we will open new doors, so more people will have access to effective behavioral health care. Harborview has served as a critical safety net for disadvantaged and vulnerable patients with serious mental health and substance-use problems. Our experts evaluate more than 5,000 patients a year are admitted to Harborview’s psychiatric emergency department, and Harborview has three times more psychiatric inpatient beds than nearby medical centers.

The BHI will train the next generation of behavioral health care professionals in evidence-based treatment and will disseminate effective practice. In partnership, we plan to drive dialogue to have an even stronger voice in the community: to advocate for awareness, reduce stigma and to support evidence-based policy decision making and provide greater access to recovery-oriented programs. What’s more, Harborview and UW Medicine’s Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, which has served as a cornerstone for mental health research and training in our four-state region, will expand its services using underutilized technology. In creating the Behavioral Health Institute, we position ourselves to work closely with community partners and capitalize on existing strengths in research, quality patient care, and specialized training to improve behavioral health care.

THE INSTITUTE’S FIRST INITIATIVES

Harborview and the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences have established initial priorities that will have a major impact on patients and families, both locally and regionally.

IMPROVING CARE FOR YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS WITH EARLY PSYCHOSIS

Serious mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia and other forms of psychosis, typically appear during adolescence and young adulthood. These conditions — which arrive with symptoms of paranoia, hallucinations and social withdrawal — often cause tremendous suffering for youth, young adults and their families. These problems are compounded by an ineffective response: even when patients and families reach out for help, the healthcare system may not have the specialized training or have awareness of the range of resources to address the complexity adequately.

With the unique needs of youth and young adults in mind, we have launched the Specialized Treatment for Early Psychosis (STEP) program. Research shows that early intervention significantly improves the course of the illness and results in better outcomes. Our team consists of psychiatrists, psychotherapists, employment/education specialists, peers and other experts, as needed. Together, they will help youth and young adults get accurate diagnoses and timely and effective care — allowing them—and their families to have the brightest future possible. The STEP Program was formally launched in winter 2019.
STRENGTHENING CRISIS INTERVENTION
All too often, patients, families and first responders have few places to turn for assistance when new or urgent behavioral health problems arise. The result is overuse of emergency rooms and inadequate behavioral health care. Through the BHI, we will create a safe recovery place for individuals who have a mental health and/or substance use disorder crisis and who are in need of immediate help from a team of trained psychiatrists, nurses, social workers, therapists, and peer support counselors. Clinic staff will triage patients, provide short-term care and referral services, with the goal of stabilization and treatment in the community, whenever possible. Research shows that those suffering from acute psychiatric conditions respond better to a calming, supportive environment, monitored by trained staff, like those found in community-based recovery programs; community-based programs have a dual advantage because they also have the ability to accept even the most acute psychiatric patients. This improved recovery-oriented environment will promote substantial improvements in outcomes, safety, quality of patient care and satisfaction. If hospitalization is required, staff will work to facilitate both voluntary and involuntary inpatient admission.

EXPANDING TELEPSYCHIATRY
Most rural areas do not have a single practicing psychiatrist or psychologist. As a result, many people in rural areas in behavioral health crisis have to wait a significant period of time to receive help. The Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences has a long history of professional practice and innovation in telehealthcare. Telepsychiatry serves as an important avenue to earlier intervention, better outcomes and a reduced need for higher, more expensive levels of intervention. We aim to expand our successful telepsychiatry program to rural Emergency Departments throughout the state, providing regular and emergency video and telephone consultation based out of Harborview’s Psychiatric Emergency Services.

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE TRAINING CENTER
In recognition of both the pronounced inaccessibility of evidence-based practices (EBPs) across systems of care in community-based behavioral health settings and the lack of standardized curricula and treatment protocols, the BHI will offer a new training center, one that is focused on developing curricula and promoting the widespread availability of EBPs to improve addiction and co-occurring mental health services and recovery-oriented outcomes for adults and families.

Core functions of the training center will align with other system transformation efforts across Washington State, including, but not limited to, Behavioral Health Integration, Washington’s Medicaid Transformation, other best practice and training efforts within the University of Washington and the three Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) -funded Technology Transfer Center grants held by the University of Washington in the areas of Prevention, Addiction and Mental Health to address the training needs for SAMHSA’s Region 10 (Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington).

BHI LOCATION
The BHI is located at Harborview Medical Center. While our long-term plan is to build a new structure to house all programs of the BHI, we have launched the Specialized Treatment for Early Psychosis (STEP) program within our existing space; meanwhile, we will continue to seek planning and capital for our new building and to launch additional BHI initiatives as resources are identified.