

I am passionate about access to mental health care. In particular I am concerned about the waiting lists to see doctoral level psychologists around the state and reimbursement for their services. I would like to see reimbursement for these services improved so that they can do the jobs they trained to do - providing high quality psychotherapy and supervising others to do the same! Very few doctoral level psychologists in private practice accept Medicaid or Medicare insurance (I have only found 5 in Chittenden County in my personal search to refer to patients and none of them are accepting new patients). My patients have to see psychologists outside of the state to get access to care for their OCD among other problems! I'd love to see psychologists being incentivized to provide this care in the state!

When it comes to improving access to psychiatric care and medication management, there are better and more clinically and cost- effective ways to do this than expanding prescribing to psychologists.

The first is to improve reimbursement rates for providing this care in patients' medical homes - using Collaborative Care work. Instead of expanding scope of practice for inadequately trained health professionals, we can work to make this model fairly compensated for the medical providers involved by mandating appropriate reimbursement rates for this collaboration. The Collaborative Care Model integrates mental and primary health care, extending the reach of psychiatrists by leveraging partnerships with other health professionals. In this care model, psychiatrists, primary care physicians and other behavioral health care clinicians collaborate using shared care plans to deliver care to patients at a familiar location. The psychiatrist provides guidance and makes diagnostic and treatment recommendations on site or via telemedicine. The Collaborative Care Model is one of the best-studied and most highly effective ways to improve access to mental health care, with over 90 randomized controlled trials demonstrating its effectiveness.

Second, the state can also support the Vermont-Consultation Psychiatry Access Program which extends the principles of the collaborative care model. It allows medical providers to consult with child and adolescent psychiatrists as well as perinatal psychiatrists to get patients by phone to quickly get answers.

Best wishes,
Bud Vana MD

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