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## **Improving the Health of Mental Health Consumers**

### **Effective Policies and Practices**

*ABSTRACT: Consumers of mental health services die an average of 25 years earlier than the general public. Many of the health conditions that are associated with death in the United States and premature death in mental health consumers can be prevented and managed with positive health habits. The six most common causes of death are heart disease, cancer, stroke, lung conditions, accidents, and diabetes. We assert that many of the known risk factors for early death can be addressed with positive health habits. We discuss barriers to ideal health care, describe what is known about effective interventions for common risk factors, and, where information is available, what kinds of special interventions have been found to be effective for mental health consumers. We close with a set of recommendations based on three levels of interventions: those that can be readily implemented with little additional resource; those*

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*that require local leadership and some resources; and those that require national leadership to transform the current poor health status of many consumers in the United States.*

Persons with mental illness die an average of 25 years earlier than the general population [1]. This alarming realization has received much recent attention in the mental health community. Although it has long been known that individuals with mental disabilities die earlier than members of the general population, this fresh look at the premature mortality of this group in the United States punctuates the problem and suggests that, if anything, the gap between the health of the general population and the part of our population with mental disabilities is widening. This paper provides a background of the current context of this alarming shortened lifespan as well as current information regarding effective practices and policy. We conclude with a set of recommendations for stakeholders that are targeted to increase the health of individuals with mental illnesses in the United States. Recommendations are organized into three levels: those that can be virtually immediately implemented with little additional resources, those that require substantial organizational-level changes and leadership efforts to support, and those that require substantial national leadership and promotion to implement. Specifically, this paper aims to create a clear pathway in practice and policy that will increase the lifespan of individuals with mental disabilities by 10 years over the next 10 years. Ten years within 10 years is the goal.

Several leading national organizations involved in driving mental health policy have publicly prioritized the problem of health care for those with mental disabilities. The Technical Report from the National Association of Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD), *Morbidity and Mortality in People with Serious Mental Illness* [1], identified issues related to access to health care as among the contributing factors to chronic medical illness and early death of people with serious mental illness.

The NASMHPD's behavioral health/primary care integration principle is

physical health care is a core component of basic services to persons with serious mental illness. Ensuring access to preventive health care and ongoing integration and management of medical care is a primary responsibility and mission of mental health authorities. [2, p. 5]

Such statements point the way to a new focus on assuring that the people served by the public mental health system have access to appropriate health care and that all care is coordinated. To achieve wellness, we must address the structure and funding of the health care delivery system, lack of capacity for primary care, stigma and discrimination, poor quality/provision of service, and lack of adequate health care coverage.

The Bazelon Center report, *Get It Together: How to Integrate Physical and Mental Healthcare for People with Serious Mental Disorders* [3], focuses primarily on integration and the problems stemming from a fragmented health care system. The report states, "In a recovery-oriented mental health system, physical health care is as central to an individual's service plan as housing, job training or education" (p. 3). The report describes barriers to integrated care and highlights four service delivery models for integrating care.

In early 2007, the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare conducted a survey of its member community behavioral health centers (CBHCs) regarding general medical priorities, capacity and current practices.

Among 181 respondents, 91% reported placing a high or medium priority on increasing quality of general medical health care for their clients. More than two-thirds of CBHCs reported having the capacity to screen for common medical problems (hypertension, obesity, dyslipidemia and diabetes). However only one in two had the capacity to provide any treatment for those conditions, and one in three had the capacity to provide the services onsite. The most common barriers to providing general medical services were problems in reimbursement (72.1%), workforce limitations (68.4%), physical plant constraints (60.8%) and lack of community referral options (55.8%). [4]

Mental Health America has developed the following policy statement:

Mental Health America (MHA) is committed to ensuring that there is a significant reduction in the alarmingly high rates of overall health problems (morbidity) and premature death (mortality) among individuals with serious mental illnesses. For mental health consumers to have a fair chance to live healthy and long lives, MHA believes that medical practice, health policy and public dialogue must reflect the fact that overall health and mental health are intertwined. [5]

This statement is associated with a call to action to promote quality health care for individuals with mental illness.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) has recently issued a well-developed policy document that includes advocacy for consumer self-empowerment in achieving improved health and well-being. The NAMI policy states: “Wellness is a part of the recovery process. Consumers must be empowered to achieve wellness through consumer education and peer support” [6, p. 19]. Additionally, the NAMI document advocates for increased access to quality primary care as well as dental care for individuals with mental illness.

### **Defining the Problem**

Much of the premature mortality in mental health consumers is due to the same health problems that the general population faces. To understand the nature of premature death, it is important to understand the causes of mortality in the general population. We need to understand what is known about successful health interventions and whether there is value in creating specialized health interventions or facilitating access to mainstream traditional health resources. Moreover, we need an understanding of the the barriers to ideal health that individuals with mental disabilities face.

### ***Mortality in the General Population***

In 2004, the average life expectancy in the United States at birth reached a record high at 77.8 years [7]. The six most common causes of death in the U.S. general population are

- diseases of the heart (heart disease),
- malignant neoplasms (cancer),
- cerebrovascular diseases (stroke),
- chronic lower respiratory diseases,
- accidents (unintentional injuries), and
- diabetes mellitus.

No national data are readily available on the causes of death in persons with mental disabilities. Many of the state studies have found a similar order with a slightly greater chance of death by accident and slightly lower chance of death by cancer.

The Framingham study, conducted by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, was designed in 1948 to follow the development of

cardiovascular conditions of a large group of individuals over a lifetime. This study started out with over 5,000 participants and is now in its third generation of recruits. From this study we have learned a great deal about the life course of many major illnesses that relate to the development of the number-one cause of death in the United States—cardiovascular conditions. We have learned about the risk factors contributing to this condition such as high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, smoking, obesity, diabetes, and physical inactivity. Other Framingham projects include stroke and dementia, osteoporosis and arthritis, nutrition, diabetes, eye diseases, hearing disorders, lung diseases, and genetic patterns of common diseases. This study has provided invaluable information about the risk factors that contribute to these illness processes that are the leading causes of death in the U.S. population. Information from the Framingham study has been substantiated by the more recently developed large national survey, the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. From these large U.S. population-based samples and surveys, we know a great deal about general risk factors that contribute to death in the United States. From this study, we have learned that certain disease states are associated with a relative risk of increased death.

### ***Prevalence of High-Risk Medical Illness in Persons with Mental Illness***

*Prevalence* is a term used to describe the rate or number of persons who have a certain condition. Numerous studies have reported an increase in the prevalence of general medical conditions in persons with mental disabilities. In general, this information is patched together because there is currently no central national database or source on the health statistics of persons with mental illness. Additionally, these patched-together resources often look at the prevalence of illness and health conditions depending on what types of data are available (e.g., insurance claims, health surveys, etc.)

Several studies confirm that the prevalence of cardiovascular illness and factors that increase the risk of having cardiovascular illness are higher in persons with mental illness than in the general population [8–15].

A review of causes of death in the United Kingdom in a community

sample of persons with serious mental illness found that the most common causes of death were chronic heart disease and stroke. This finding was not wholly explained by antipsychotic medication, smoking, or socioeconomic status [8]. A comprehensive review of the presence of cardiovascular risk factors in Norway found no significant difference in the rates of cardiovascular risk factors for schizophrenia compared with bipolar disorder but found twice the rate of these risk factors than in the general nonmentally ill population [9]. In a study of 234 mental health clinic outpatients in Australia, Davidson, Judd, Jolley, Hocking, Thompson, and Hyland [10] found that the mentally ill had a higher prevalence of smoking, overweight and obesity, lack of moderate exercise, and harmful levels of alcohol consumption and salt intake than matched community samples. No differences were found in the prevalence of hypertension. In addition, men at the clinic were less likely to have had cholesterol screening than the women.

Several federal surveys—including the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) administered National Survey on Drug Use and Health and the National Health Interview Survey, conducted by the Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Health Statistics—use the K6 instrument as an indicator for serious psychological disturbance in lieu of actual psychiatric symptoms and diagnoses. The K6 looks at impairments in a person's life related to the presence of significant mental disturbance and gives reliable estimates of serious psychological distress (SPD). Pratt, Dey, and Cohen [16] found higher rates of many medical illnesses in persons with SPD. Specifically, those with SPD had higher rates of obesity and were more likely to smoke. They had a higher prevalence heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, and stroke than persons without SPD. Pratt et al. concluded that persons with SPD present disadvantages on both socioeconomic and health outcomes levels.

Dickerson et al. [11] looked at the presence of multiple health conditions in persons with schizophrenia and affective disorders in Baltimore. They found a markedly lower health status in persons with mental illness compared with a general population. Persons with mental illness had an increased rate of smoking, exercise at less than recommended rates, more presence of other major medical conditions, and more obesity (defined as body mass index over 30). This method for examining health status also demonstrated a poor health status in the nonmentally ill controls, but those with mental illness had a lower health status in every criterion.

An additional important contribution made by Dickerson et al. [11] was the finding that a higher level of education (defined as either completing or not completing high school) in all groups significantly correlated with better health status. Similarly, in a review of the impact of health literacy on the mortality of elderly demonstrated that reading fluency had a significant impact on mortality [17]. This finding provides information on the value of health literacy in promoting health behavior for the general public as well as those with mental illness.

A study in Canada regarding access to ideal treatment for cardiac condition demonstrates inequitable access to ideal treatment [18]. This research found that in some cases, psychiatric patients—especially those who had ever been psychiatric inpatients—were significantly less likely to undergo specialized or revascularization procedures, including cardiac catheterization and angioplasty.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in the United States and may be the only leading cause of death that does not have an increased prevalence in persons with serious mental illness compared with the general population. Using a large pool of insurance claims, Carney, Woolson, Jones, Noyes, and Doebbeling [19] found that individuals with mental disorders were no more or less likely to develop a malignancy than those without. Within the types of cancer that did develop, there was a slightly greater chance of respiratory system cancers in persons with mental illness, which was postulated to have been related to the increased rate of smoking in this population. Osborn et al. [8] similarly found that the rates of cancer-related deaths, other than those directly attributable to smoking, were not increased. In the United Kingdom, Levav et al. [20] found a slightly decreased rate of cancer in persons with schizophrenia. He has suggested that possible genetic links to schizophrenia may also be associated with a genetic link to protection from cancer. Carney and Jones [12] conducted a review of health claims for over 3,500 individuals with bipolar disorder and described a significantly greater presence of multiple medical conditions. Compared with persons who had no claims for a mental illness, persons with bipolar disorder were more likely to have multiple comorbid and chronic medical conditions. An increased prevalence was found for conditions spanning all organ systems. Additionally, hyperlipidemia, lymphoma, and metastatic cancer were the only conditions less likely to occur in persons with bipolar disorder than the general population.

Cerebrovascular accidents (i.e., strokes) are the third leading cause of death in the United States. Over 14 percent of those with a stroke have a second stroke within the first year. Stroke is one of the leading causes of disability in the United States. Risk factors for stroke include hypertension, diabetes, high blood cholesterol, and heavy drinking (more than five drinks a day). Other risk factors include smoking, indirect smoking exposure, moderate drinking, weight, inactivity, and age [21]. In a study of over 741 practice settings in the United Kingdom covering about 8 million lives, the death rates of 46,136 individuals with schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder and delusional disorder were compared with 300,426 randomly selected controls [8]. They found that individuals with a mental illness diagnosis were two to three times more likely to die from cardiovascular and stroke conditions; specifically, they were about twice as likely to die from stroke at an age less than 50 years compared with nonmentally disabled individuals. This study also revealed that individuals taking either first- or second-generation antipsychotic medications were more likely than those not taking these medications to have a stroke.

Respiratory conditions are listed as the fourth most common cause of death. Smoking is a common cause of chronic respiratory inflammation and conditions such as emphysema, bronchitis, and recurrent pneumonia. It is widely known that individuals with long-term mental illnesses, particularly schizophrenia, smoke at a higher rate than the general population. Not unexpectedly, it follows that individuals with mental illness have respiratory diseases at a higher rate than the general population. Several large studies have confirmed this conclusion [1, 9, 15]. Looking at health claims information of persons with schizophrenia, Levav et al. [20] found increased odds of having chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or emphysema to be about twice as high as in controls.

Persons with mental illness have an increased rate of early death and complications related to accidents. Accidents are the fifth leading cause of death in the United States and may be relatively higher in persons with mental disabilities. The NASMHPD paper [1] concluded that about 30 percent of premature deaths are related to accidents and suicide. A review of causes of deaths of individuals who had been involved with the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health, demonstrated an increased early death rate by as much as 14.1 years for men and 5.7 for women compared to age-matched controls. This study found that individuals

with mental illness have an increased rate of ongoing cardiovascular and other illnesses that contribute to early mortality and that a disproportionate amount of these deaths were caused by accidents, which included toxicity from medications [22]. Accidents can be due to many potential causes that in some cases are increased in individuals with mental disabilities. Accidents that might increase a chance for early death might include physical trauma from being the victim of crime of violence, suicide attempts, homelessness, and household injury.

Diabetes is listed as the sixth leading cause of death in the United States. It has been well documented that individuals with schizophrenia have diabetes at a higher rate than the general population. Dixon et al. [23] demonstrated that the rate of diagnosed diabetes existed before the onset of the use of many second generation antipsychotic medications. Claims information from research done by Carney and Jones [12] from 1996–2001 on individuals with schizophrenia found a rate of about twice the prevalence of diabetes with complications than in a comparison nonschizophrenia group. Although some of the newer antipsychotic medications were available at this time, they alone would not be solely responsible for this doubling of the rate of complicated diabetes as late of 2001.

A discussion of the prevalence of diabetes and mental illness would not be complete without some consideration of the contribution that several of the new antipsychotic medications play in increasing blood glucose and risk of diabetes. Several contemporary antipsychotic medications are known to contribute to the risk of diabetes and weight gain. Information on metabolic and the onset of diabetes associated with the use of antipsychotic medications specifically from the Clinical Antipsychotic Trials of Intervention Effectiveness study is reviewed by Nasrallah [24]. Recent review of these risks of diabetes and other factors such as weight gain and hypercholesterol has been conducted by Newcomer [25–26]. In general, the medications clozapine and olanzapine are clearly associated with weight gain as well as a risk of cholesterol and blood glucose increase, which lead to diabetes. It has been suggested that, for these two medications, the increase in blood sugar and cholesterol may occur even if a person does not gain weight. These risks of weight gain with clozapine and olanzapine have been described as being similar to the lower potency first-generation antipsychotics, such as chlorpromazine and thioridazine. The newest medications available for use in the United

States, ziprasidone and aripiprazole, have not consistently been found to increase weight, blood glucose, or cholesterol. In small studies, risperidone and quetiapine, which have been in use for several years, have been found to be associated with a small amount or no weight gain and are not clearly associated with increased cholesterol or blood sugar. The risk of weight gain with risperidone seems to be similar to that of potent first-generation antipsychotic medications such as haloperidol and fluphenazine.

This section has been framed around information that connects the health status of persons with mental illness to the most common causes of death in the general population. A number of other studies have found general poor health in individuals with mental disabilities. In 1999, Dixon, Postrado, Delahanty, Fischer, and Lehman [13] reported from a review of 741 persons with schizophrenia in the Patient Outcomes Research Team Study:

A greater number of current medical problems independently contributed to worse perceived physical health status, more severe psychosis and depression, and greater likelihood of a history of a suicide attempt. This study underscores the need to attend to somatic health care for persons with schizophrenia as well as the linkage of physical and mental health status. (p. 496)

### ***Specific Focus on Early Mortality in Persons with Mental Illness***

Colton and Manderscheid [27] reviewed death information on public mental health consumers in eight states. They found that public mental health clients had a higher relative risk of death than the general population and reaffirmed that the most common causes of death in this population were natural causes similar to the commonest causes of death nationwide. This landmark work pulled together information that supports the statement that individuals with mental disabilities die as much as 25 years earlier than others in the United States. In California, Segal and Kotler [28] found that, compared with the general population, residents of sheltered care facilities were 2.85 times more likely to die than other age-matched Californians. Early mortality was due to heart disease, cerebrovascular diseases, and all other natural and unnatural causes except malignant neoplasms. A review of deaths of persons previ-

ously admitted to state psychiatric hospitals in Ohio demonstrated that the years of potential life lost for persons with mental illness averaged 32 years [14]. Cardiovascular causes were the most common cause of death, and obesity (24 percent) and hypertension (22 percent) were the most prevalent medical comorbidities.

In 1996, Felker [15] conducted a Medline review and found 66 published studies that reported that persons with serious mental illness had an increase in the number and severity of medical illnesses and that these individuals had early death related to both medical problems and accidents compared with the general population.

Figures on the death of persons with mental disabilities are not readily available in national databases as they are with other designated health disparate groups such as Hispanics, African Americans, or Asians and Pacific Islanders. These health disparity groups have varying disparities in death rates, but none have a life expectancy that is greater by even 10 years more than the general population. The widest gap in traditional health disparity groups is seen in black men with a life expectancy of 69.5 years in 2004 (which is 8.3 years shorter than the national average life expectancy). For most minority groups, this gap in life expectancy is slowly closing. These readily available statistics enable trends within these special populations to be identified and prioritized in policy, health promotion, and resource allocation for these groups. This kind of information about persons with serious mental illness is not readily available on a national scale.

Clearly, the 25-year shortened lifespan for persons with mental illness as reported in the NASMHPD technical report is off the scale and should activate alarms throughout health communities that this discrepancy in lifespan is of vital concern.

### ***Barriers to Effective Health Care***

Individuals with mental disabilities die prematurely and the causes of death are similar to the cause of death for all other persons. Many of the conditions related to these causes of death can be treated or prevented through access to effective health care information and health care providers. There are several possible ways to organize a discussion of barriers. This work organizes them into three categories: the health-care delivery system including structure, professionals, and financing; the

health literacy of mental health consumers; and other indirect factors such as socioeconomic stressors that affect ideal health care for persons with mental illness.

### *Barriers in the Structure and Funding of Health-Care Delivery*

According to the NASMHPD report,

Access to physical health care for people with SMI [serious mental illness] is hindered by both the structure and the underfunding of the publicly supported physical health and behavioral health systems of care. Issues include

- lack of reimbursement for coordinated care across service systems;
- lack of reimbursement for health education, support and family services;
- inadequate and underskilled case management services to support self management and linkage to services;
- poor coordination between health care and behavioral health care systems; and
- lack of integrated treatment for co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders, which lead to inadequate diagnosis and treatment of substance use disorders. ([1], p. 23)

Negotiating the U.S. health care system in its current state can be a challenge under the best of circumstances. Thirty years ago, as was idealized in the popular television series *Marcus Welby*, individuals who required an evaluation were often admitted to a hospital for a full work up or treatment of a problem. This evaluation included daily interaction with a caring physician as well as access to a host of highly qualified hospital and nursing staff who had a role in health care promotion and education. It was not hard to imagine your physician and these related staff as being your medical home. In contrast, today the physician's office often conceptually serves as a hub from which there are referrals or outsourcing to a variety of labs, radiography settings, specialists, and providers such as physical therapists, nutritionists, and so on. Inside this conceptual hub, or primary care setting, additional pressures have restricted the time available for the physician to oversee all aspects of an individual's health as well as take the time to consistently educate all patients on all aspects of a current presenting problem as well as potential

health risk factors. An additional factor that may increasingly limit access is a projected potential shortage of primary care physicians, particularly in rural and underserved areas [29].

For individuals with mental disabilities, there can be additional difficulties in negotiating these complex systems. This complexity is particularly problematic if the consumer experiences competing, uncoordinated demands in keeping up with the management of mental and physical well-being. It has been suggested that the creation of a “medical home” within a CBHO or mental health treatment program for individuals that have frequent visits to these centers might facilitate greater access to services that support ideal health as well as mental health. In other words, for many individuals, importing a medical home into the place they choose for mental health care, may make access to all health care more efficient and, therefore, more effective.

Whereas at one time, conceptually at least, the most seriously mentally ill were treated in all-inclusive asylums that provided health care on site, our current treatment paradigm is bifurcated with primary care sites being distinct from specialty mental health care.

In the last decade, we have learned some detail about the efficacy of programs designed to increase the diagnosis and treatment of some behavioral health conditions in primary care settings. Through the MacArthur Depression and Primary Care Initiative,<sup>1</sup> we have learned that the identification and treatment of depression in primary care can be greatly enhanced through specialized training of office staff as well as the importing of direct on-site access to mental health treatment with defined follow-up. The evidence-based toolkit culminating from this project recommends a system approach in enhancing the diagnosis of depression in primary care. Through the work of the PRISM-E study [30], we have learned that elderly individuals seen in a primary care setting are more likely to receive more appropriate diagnosis and treatment of a substance abuse or a mental health condition when specialty mental health care is imported into the primary care clinic. Imported providers were more effective than facilitated referral out to mental health specialists.

This line of services research has resulted in more primary care practice settings being better equipped to address depression and behavioral health problems on site. Additionally, the U.S. Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), which funds Community Health Centers (CHC), has changed its requirements

so that, to be considered a full spectrum clinic site, CHCs must begin providing on-site mental health services. The CHC system in the United State now serves over 14 million individuals in nearly 1,200 clinical sites and targets uninsured individuals in underserved areas [31]. Although significant progress has been made in the area of increasing access to the treatment of depression in primary care, significant barriers remain. In many settings, financing is described as the greatest barrier.

Work on integrating mental health services into primary care settings has demonstrated that there are a number of barriers in how Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement is structured (e.g., disallowance of more than one type on encounter on the same day). For example, the 2005 National Correct Coding Initiative Policy Manual for Medicare Services, Chapter XI, Evaluation and Management Services, C, Psychiatric Services [32] contains the following language:

When medical services, other than psychiatric services, are provided in addition to psychiatric services, separate evaluation and management codes cannot be reported. The psychiatric service includes the evaluation and management services provided according to CMS policy. (p. 5)

Medicaid and Medicare must become partners in improving access to care, data analysis, and designing and implementing strategies that will be effective with the population served by the public mental health system. The NASMHPD report [1] recommends the following:

- Assure financing methods for service improvements. Include reimbursement for coordination activities, case management, transportation and other supports to ensure access to physical health care services.
- As a health care purchaser, Medicaid should:
  - Provide coverage for health education and prevention services (primary prevention) that will reduce or slow the impact of disease for people with serious mental illness.
  - Establish rates adequate to assure access to primary care by persons with serious mental illness.
  - Cover smoking cessation and weight reduction treatments.
  - Use community case management to improve engagement with and access to preventive and primary care. (p. 42)

At least one study [33] has determined that far too little information and research are available on models of care that import primary care into existing mental health care centers.

### *Lack of Adequate Health-Care Coverage*

According to the SAMHSA 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, one in five people with a serious mental health condition are uninsured. Lack of health care coverage represents an enormous barrier to addressing the health care needs of the uninsured population with serious mental illness. Within the community mental health center population, the uninsured may be as many as one in four, depending on the state system; in some states, people with serious mental illness who are uninsured may have difficulty being served in the mental health system, much less the health care system.

Individuals may be uninsured or underinsured. Many individuals who seek services in community mental health centers have health care insurance through Medicaid. Eligibility for Medicaid is determined by each state and is income based. Depending on the state Medicaid system, 25 percent to 90 percent of persons served by CBHOs will be covered by Medicaid some of the year. An unpublished analysis done by MCPP Healthcare Consulting shows that subsets of people frequently drop on and off of Medicaid coverage within any given year.

CBHO infrastructure may not be familiar with Medicare as a payer source. Even though many individuals who are disabled are Medicare beneficiaries, Medicare has minimal coverage for outpatient mental health services so that it may not have been billed for specialty mental health services. (Most CBHO behavioral rehabilitative services are covered by Medicaid and not Medicare.) Medicare does, however, become an important payer when considering the delivery of physical health care services. The morbidity and mortality that has been identified in this group has enormous impact on health care costs. Moving toward more prevention and early intervention services could have a significant long-range impact.

In some states, contracts with managed care companies to manage general health care are used to provide enhanced and preventive-oriented benefits for individuals and reduce emergency room care. In some cases, such as Washington State, the population with serious mental illness covered under the disability aid codes of Medicaid is not included in Medicaid managed care contracts.

Another contemporary facet in considering barriers to services for Medicaid and Medicare enrollees is that due to low reimbursement rates, in certain areas of the country, primary care physicians are closing their

practices to these patients. Additionally, there is a trend in some states since the enactment of the 2006 Deficit Reduction Act to provide greater benefits and incentives to Medicaid recipients who agree to be compliant with preventive medical recommendations. These are new program designs, and it is not at all clear at this time that any restrictions of access based on noncompliance will help individuals who have difficulties with health literacy to become more proactive in the management of their own health care. In other words, many individuals opine that this style of program will only widen the gap between individuals who are health literate, compliant, and do well and those that struggle with basic access to and compliance with ideal health-care recommendations [34].

### *Barriers Related to Health-Care Professionals*

Research suggests that people with SMI [serious mental illness] frequently face discrimination in accessing and receiving appropriate health care. This may be due to: unease of primary care providers with the needs of the serious mental illness population [and] decreased expectations of clients as partners in care. [1, pp. 23–24]

Often physical health care providers erroneously believe that persons with mental illness are not capable of participating in making decisions regarding their own health care and do not involve them in weighing risks and benefits, considering alternative treatment strategies, and so on. They may be dismissive of that person's motivation to be healthy, which may result in lesser care such as not recommending smoking cessation, for example. Primary care providers who have not had much contact with persons with serious mental health issues often think that they are dangerous and are afraid of them.

There is some research that indicates that there is a difference (which could be labeled discrimination) in the health care that people with mental illness receive. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) system offers better health care access and more support for recommended monitoring and disease management than are available to many people with serious mental illness. Nonetheless, Desai, Rosenheck, Druss, and Perlin found [35] that in the VA system the odds were greater that a diabetic with a record of a psychotic or substance use disorder received standard of care diabetic monitoring (e.g., HbA1c testing, low-density lipoproteins [LDL] testing, eye examination) at lower rates than those who did not have a record of a behavioral health diagnosis. This may be "the

best case scenario” currently experienced by diabetic individuals with serious mental illness—those without health care coverage or a medical home would likely receive less monitoring and disease management. A study of access to cardiac revascularization procedures in a large national sample found that individuals with any history of a mental illness diagnosis were significantly less likely to have received procedures such as angioplasty and cardiac surgery after having an myocardial infarction or heart attack [36]. Additional research in a study of elderly Medicare recipients recovering after myocardial infarction found that individuals with mental illness had significantly higher mortality one year after the signal hospitalization than those without a mental illness [37]. A fourth related study of access to preventive care in the VA found that individuals with mental illness were only slightly less likely than other veterans to receive preventive care [38].

#### *Poor Quality/Poor Provision of Service*

Previous research provides us with examples regarding overuse, underuse, and misuse of services related to the population with serious mental illness. Regarding overuse of intensive services, persons with serious mental illness have high use of somatic emergency services. According to prior studies, this population’s underuse of less intensive resources includes fewer routine preventive services [38], lower rates of cardiovascular procedures [36–37], and worse diabetes care [39]. Finally, regarding misuse, Daumit et al. [40] found that during medical hospitalization, persons with schizophrenia are about twice as likely to have infections due to medical care postoperative deep venous thrombosis and postoperative sepsis.

#### *Barriers Related to the Health Literacy of Mental Health Consumers*

Increasingly, the health literacy of individual patients has become a vital component in assuring ideal health. Americans can no longer expect that all health information comes from a single primary care resource; rather, health information is provided from a variety of resources including communities, schools, public health campaigns, social networks and from a variety of commercial advertisements. Thus, being able to access—as

well as effectively sort out—the relative validity of health information has become complex.

Health literacy is defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in *Healthy People 2010* as “the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain process and understand basic health information and services for appropriate health decisions” [41]. Others have extended this definition to include the ability to act on health information.

Increasingly, individuals are receiving health information from a variety of resources on the Internet, which is relatively unmonitored and unregulated. A Pew Foundation report [42], issued in 2003, found that one-half of Americans receive health information from the Internet. (In 2008, this number is likely to have increased significantly.) Common health searches included questions about weight management, smoking cessation, and information on prescription drugs. Additional information from this project reveals that low-income households (defined in this study as households earning less than \$30,000 a year) are less likely to have Internet access than other households [43]. Mental health consumers, particularly those in low-income settings, may have difficulty accessing Internet-based health information, which can be a disadvantage in understanding and implementing health recommendations.

Consumers bring to any health care encounter their experience, knowledge, and expectations. Anyone can experience barriers to an ideal health encounter, but some mental health consumers may have additional barriers. These might include intense anxiety, difficulty concentrating, and active features of a mental illness such as paranoia about the provider or certain procedures (e.g., a consumer with a family history of breast cancer who refuses routine mammogram screenings). This paranoia could be a temporary feature of a mental illness that is not consistent with the person’s usual belief, or it could be a concern about radiation that is completely unrelated to any state of a mental illness. Either way, it is a barrier to accessing ideal health.

It is also important to remember that some mental health consumers have experienced the “trauma of treatment” including coercive treatments, involuntary institutionalization, misinformation regarding known side effects of medication, and other mistreatment by mental health professionals. They have lived historical reasons for mistrusting medical professionals. Special needs such as these may be hard for traditional primary care providers to sort out efficiently and may result

in frustration in working with a person who might appear to be resistant to sound medical advice. Individual consumer issues are very important to understand in working to achieve ideal health care. One study of VA patients established a pattern of differences in health care access between individuals with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Kilbourne et al. [44] determined that VA consumers with bipolar disorder reported greater problems with actual access to health care, whereas those diagnosed with schizophrenia were less satisfied with the process of care.

Often mental health consumers dependent on Social Security income or Social Security disability payments live on very limited income, which limits their range of food choices and living environments. The information regarding the impact that financial limitations have on health is extensive. Turrell [45] recently demonstrated that food shoppers in low-income households were less likely to purchase foods that were high in fiber and low in fat, salt, and sugar. Another interesting example of the connection between financial limitations and health is a study by Cauter and Spiegel [46] that found that disrupted sleep may be a significant factor in overall poor health status. Cauter and Spiegel suggested that often individuals living in low income and transient settings are unable to get good sleep, which significantly impacts their overall health status. In general, persons living at or near poverty have a variety of difficulties with initial access to providers, access to procedures and tests, and limitations in the capacity to adhere consistently to long-term treatment and follow-up services.

Levinson Miller, Druss, Dombrowski, and Rosenheck [47] reviewed CBHO consumer accounts of access to general health care. They used a sample of primarily Medicaid recipients in South Carolina. Although this study was small, it demonstrated several interesting points. Mental health consumers reported lower quality of care and more difficulty accessing care. They reported that usually care was not coordinated between patients' primary care and mental health care professionals. This study did not find mental health consumers to be uninterested in primary care or to doubt the benefits of medical health care.

### **Effective Practice: What Works**

Persons with mental disability in the United States have high rates of common medical illnesses and have markedly early deaths associated

with these illnesses. The impact of virtually all of these medical conditions can be reduced through changes in health habits. Health habits include lifestyle changes such as nutrition and exercise, attention to recommended preventive monitoring, and adherence to recommended medical treatments that are designed to reduce or prevent longer term complications of an illness.

Keeping in mind the overarching goal of this project in achieving 10 years of life added to the average lifespan of individuals with mental illness within 10 years, we focus on the illnesses and processes most associated with death. We then consider how members of the mental health community might shape effective interventions to address these.

The health habits that contribute to the common causes of death overlap so that a change in one health habit may help to reduce the risk of several medical conditions that are associated with death. Smoking, for instance, contributes directly to the five most common causes of death. Each health habit or risk factor is discussed in terms of current recommendations for effective interventions and what, if anything, is known about the efficacy of these interventions in persons with mental disability.

### ***Smoking***

According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Smoking Cessation Leadership Center [48]:

Persons with mental illness smoke half of all cigarettes produced—and are only half as likely to quit as smokers without mental illness. Approximately 50% of those with serious mental illness are smokers, compared with 23% for society at large. Half of MH [mental health] deaths are due to smoking related illnesses.

These are alarming facts.

Stopping smoking has immediate and long-term effects. Quitting smoking has an immediate effect on improving cardiovascular risks and, over time, reduces the risk of respiratory cancer. It has been estimated that 35-year-old men who quit smoking extend their lives by 6.9 to 8.5 years for men and 6.1 to 7.7 years for women. Quitting at any age extends life span [49]. In the quest to add 10 years to the lifespan of individuals with mental illness, we propose that stopping smoking will get us more than 5 of the 10 years.

Today, there are a number of effective interventions that can be used to help persons quit smoking. The majority of individuals, who quit—maybe as many as 80 percent of all quitters—do so on their own without a specific program or medical assistance. Individuals who attempt to quit and are actually able to quit were more likely to have some college education and to value health than those who are not interested in quitting. Factors that predispose one to be able to quit include smoking less than one pack a day, perceiving oneself as being less likely to be smoking in a year, having fewer friends who smoke, and being employed. Factors that were associated with less likelihood of stopping smoking are higher number of cigarettes a day and marginal understanding and belief in the negative health risks of smoking [50].

Research in smoking cessation in consumers has revealed information that is helpful in thinking about promoting smoking cessation. Rohde, Kahler, Lewinsohn, and Brown [51] studied factors that are associated with likelihood of successful quitting in 941 individuals with major mental disorders. Individuals with antisocial personality traits and major depression were less likely to be able to quit. Persons with all other major psychiatric diagnoses were equally as likely to be able to quit smoking. Other traditional factors such as nicotine dependence predicted quit rates, which was independent of the mental disorder. Smoking for some with mental illness can be a normalizing experience [52]. Gershon Grand, Hwang, Han, George, and Brody [53] found that individuals with substance use and schizophrenia/schizoaffective disorder in Los Angeles were less likely to have stopped smoking after entry into an outpatient smoking cessation program. They concluded that more specialized programs might be useful for certain types of behavioral disorders such as substance use and schizophrenia/schizoaffective disorders. Dalack, Becks, Hill, Pomerleau, and Meador-Woodruff [54] and Dalack and Meador-Woodruff [55] concluded that smoking cessation and the use of a nicotine patch do not cause worsening of the hallucinations that can be associated with schizophrenia, although there might be a slight increase in dyskinesia.

Much more information is available from hospital-based smoking cessation experience than for outpatient community mental health center experience. There may be useful material from hospital-based experience with smoking cessation that could be used to help community programs develop smoking cessation initiatives. At least one recent study [56]

has determined that there is no clear advantage in providing specialized smoking cessation groups for individuals with schizophrenia using generally available community resources such as those provided by the American Lung Association.

In summary, there are a variety of methods available that can be used to facilitate smoking cessation. No clear information suggests that specialized programs are superior to other programs; however, for certain persons, individually created supports might increase the likelihood of success with smoking cessation.

### *Hypertension*

Persons with hypertension have increased rates of heart attacks, heart failure, stroke, dementia related to small recurring cerebrovascular infarcts (strokes), diabetes, and kidney failure. Hypertension can also cause damage to many other body organs. Hypertension can easily be checked by trained lay people in many places. It is recommended that a primary care provider be involved with initial diagnosis and planning a treatment course. There are two basic elements to treatment: lifestyle changes and medications. Generally, medications must be provided by a primary care physician or provider; however, lifestyle changes can be made by an informed individual and supported by others such as family and mental health care providers.

To help make treatment choices, the U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute [57] has created categories (denoted as Groups A, B, and C) according to a patient's risk factors for heart disease. Applying these categories to the severity of hypertension helps determine whether lifestyle changes alone or medications are needed (see Table 1).

Healthy lifestyle changes are an important first step for lowering blood pressure. Current guidelines recommend that people should:

- Exercise at least 30 minutes a day;
- Maintain normal weight;
- Reduce salt intake;
- Increase potassium intake;
- Limit alcohol consumption; however, moderate alcohol consumption (1–2 glasses a day) may actually lower the risk for heart attack among men with high blood pressure; and
- Consume a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products

Table 1  
**Treatment Recommendations by Stage and Risk Groups**

Risk Groups	Blood Pressure Stages (Systolic/Diastolic)		
	Prehypertension (120–139/80–89)	Mild (Stage 1) Blood Pressure (140–159/90–99)	Moderate-to-Severe (Stage 2) Blood Pressure (Systolic Pressure +160 or Diastolic Pressure +100)
Risk group A	Lifestyle changes only. (Exercise and dietary program with regular monitoring.)	Year trial of lifestyle changes only. If blood pressure is not lower at 1 year, add drug treatments.	Lifestyle changes and medications
Risk group B	Lifestyle changes only	6-month trial of lifestyle changes only. If blood pressure is not lower at 6 months, add drug treatments. Medications considered for patients with multiple risk factors	Lifestyle changes and medications
Risk group C	Lifestyle changes and medications	Lifestyle changes and medications	Lifestyle changes and medications

*Source:* U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute [57].

*Notes:* Risk Group A: Have no risk factors for heart disease. Risk Group B: Have at least one risk factor for heart disease (excluding diabetes) but have no target organ damage (such as in the kidneys, eyes, or heart, or existing heart disease). Risk Group C: Have diabetes with or without target organ damage and existing heart disease (with or without risk factors for heart disease). Risk factors for heart disease include family history of heart disease, smoking, unhealthy cholesterol and lipid levels, diabetes, and being over 60 years old.

while reducing total and saturated fat intake. (The DASH diet [58] is one way of achieving such a dietary plan.)

It is known that individuals with hypertension, especially untreated or undertreated hypertension, die at an earlier age [59]. Estimating exactly how much life is to be gained in approaching our goal of 10 years in 10 years is difficult because there is not readily available information and because there is considerable variability in the severity of the high blood pressure and in treatment compliance.

## *High Cholesterol*

High levels of cholesterol or blood lipids lead to cardiovascular disease such as atherosclerosis or building up of plaque in the artery walls. Considered alone, it is not clear that moderately high cholesterol directly causes death; rather, it contributes to heart disease and is associated with other metabolic abnormalities that clearly increase the chances of having cardiovascular disease and death.

High cholesterol can be caused by many factors and can be caused by certain of the new antipsychotic medications and is part of what we call the metabolic syndrome. The metabolic syndrome is a combination of high cholesterol, high blood sugar, and being overweight. Hypertension is commonly included. This collection of features increases the chances of having heart disease, stroke, and progressive diabetes. High cholesterol can also be caused by genetic risk factors and diet. High cholesterol is diagnosed by a blood test, which may be checked by a physician or primary care provider from medical or psychiatric settings. In general, once diagnosed, the treatment has two aspects: lifestyle changes and medication.

The most important lifestyle changes that help to treat cholesterol levels include:

- Choose foods low in saturated fat,
- Exercise regularly,
- Lose weight if you are overweight, and
- Get routine health checkups and cholesterol screenings.

These are changes almost everyone can make on his or her own or with help from a supportive family member or other supportive persons including a mental health professional. If lifestyle changes do not reduce the cholesterol enough, a doctor may recommend medication. There are several types of drugs available to help lower blood cholesterol levels. Some are better at lowering LDL cholesterol, some are good at lowering triglycerides, and others help raise high-density lipoproteins cholesterol. The most commonly used drugs for treating high LDL cholesterol are called statins. Other drugs that may be used include bile acid sequestering resins, cholesterol absorption inhibitors, fibrates, and nicotinic acid (niacin) [60]. Generally, these are prescribed by a primary care physician or provider.

### *Diet and Nutrition*

Debate is ongoing regarding whether being overweight or obese causes early death [61–62]. Leading research indicates that being overweight but not obese may not alone increase death. Overweight is generally defined as being a body mass index that is between 25 and 30. Obesity, or a body mass index greater than 30, may be a significant cause of premature death, particularly in younger and middle-aged adults [63].

What is very clear about being overweight and obese is that it is associated with many factors that contribute to lower overall health and early death. Individuals who are obese have a much more high risk of problems with many medical conditions. They have more complications from general surgery, have more falls, and less active lifestyles.

Sustaining a healthy weight and nutrition is difficult for most Americans. There is no single diet or intervention that works uniformly well. Ganguli [64] recently published a summary of the relative effects of weight loss interventions in persons with schizophrenia. This review determined that individuals with mental illness can successfully lose weight and maintain weight loss and that there is no single most effective best practice. Additionally, this work included the results of a short-term study that found that individuals with schizophrenia and mental illness can effectively avoid gaining weight associated as a side effect of certain medications when nutrition, diet, and exercise are addressed early. This result was confirmed by a small study by Jean-Baptisté et al. [65] that used an established weight loss program, modified for this specific population. This program was supplemented with practical community education regarding grocery shopping and preparing healthy food. They found that cognitive impairment had no bearing on the outcome and concluded that this type of intervention can be very successful in a community sample of persons with mental illness.

There are several approaches that can be taken to increase the quality of the diet and nutrition for individuals with serious mental illness. Certain individuals would require consultation with a registered dietitian. Others would need consultation with a primary care physician to define any special needs. However, for many, simple community-based intervention that could be supported by case management or peer specialists can be implemented. This support might include grocery store choices, healthy food preparation, and substitution of healthy for less-than-healthy foods,

portions, elimination of full-calorie drinks, and other simple behavioral guidelines.

### *Exercise and Fitness*

It has been demonstrated that fitness has many health benefits. Most recently, a focus on metabolic syndrome, which dramatically increases the risk of premature death due to cardiovascular disease, has shown that such risk factors can be reduced if not prevented with cardiovascular fitness [66]. It has been demonstrated that sedentary individuals who are a normal weight, overweight, and obese have a significantly greater chance of death from cardiovascular causes [67]. Several studies over time have demonstrated an increase in a sense of well-being and overall mental health with the onset of an exercise program [68]. There is considerable work that supports the idea that there is a mental health benefit from exercise and fitness. A study in the VA found that in a system of care that emphasizes preventive health care and counseling, individuals with mental illness received the same level of exercise and nutrition counseling that individuals without mental illness received [69].

### *Monitoring*

Monitoring includes a wide variety of health activities that are designed to identify risk for or an actual illness as early as possible. Such monitoring includes routine cancer screening such as pap smears and mammograms for women, periodic lab testing and the administration of vaccines that prevent illness. Using a VA sample of over 100,000 individuals with chronic medical illnesses, Druss, Rosenheck, Desai, and Perlin [70] identified that individuals with serious mental illness were less likely than those veterans without mental illness to have received four of the six preventive health interventions. These preventive indices were two measures of immunization, four measures of cancer screening, and two of tobacco screening and counseling. They also found that individuals with co-occurring substance abuse had fewer of the recommended preventive interventions than individuals with mental illness. Although cancer itself may not occur at an increased rate in mentally disabled individuals, it remains as a significant cause of death, and all recommended screens should be followed. Most of these tests and actual screens require ordering and coordination through a

primary care physician. Interested communities of mental health providers and peers could easily administer basic health screens and provide this information to consumers and primary care providers.

### *Diabetes*

Studies of individuals in community settings indicate that there is a wide range but overall lower quality of diabetes care provided to individual with serious mental illness compared with nonseriously mentally ill individuals in the same community. In a study of the diabetic care of just over 300 individuals in Baltimore, Goldberg et al. [71] looked at diabetic laboratory monitoring tests as well as follow-up on maintenance checkups such as eye exams and foot care. They found that individuals with serious mental illness received fewer recommended services and less education about diabetes. Thus, this study demonstrated that individuals with serious mental illness were less likely to receive the full complement of recommended services and care support.

Krein, Bingham, McCarthy, Mitchinson, Payes, and Valenstein [39] conducted a national review of care delivered to 36,546 veterans with diabetes in an attempt to determine if care delivered to individuals with serious mental illness had poorer outcomes. They determined that in the VA system, individuals with serious mental illness received diabetes care that was comparable with the care that other patients with diabetes received. The study parameters included frequency of monitoring of hemoglobin A1c, LDL, and cholesterol. Both groups had comparable A1c, LDL, and cholesterol values. Patients with diabetes and serious mental illness had more outpatient visits, both primary care and specialty visits, and made more multiclinic visits, including visits to both primary care and mental health services on the same day. These results are in contrast to an earlier study published in 2002 of the records of over 38,000 individuals with diabetes served by the VA. This study, conducted by Desai et al. [35], determined that veterans with mental disorders were slightly less likely to have had the same level of ideal diabetic care that those without mental illness had. Furthermore, they determined that most of the difference was seen in individuals with substance abuse and not as much in those with mental illness alone. This important work establishes that at least in a relatively closed and coordinated system (with a common electronic medical record) such as the VA, barriers to care can be effectively addressed.

Although, in general, it is beyond the scope of practice for most CBHOs and other mental health providers to provide diabetes treatment, monitoring for diabetes can readily occur. There are many things a community mental health staff and peer counselors can do to facilitate good diabetic control and follow-up with the recommended examinations, diet, and health screens for diabetes. It is possible to receive reimbursement for diabetes education classes under some circumstances.

### ***Accidents***

Persons with mental disabilities are at increased risk of death due to accidents and other types of trauma. Such accidents include a variety of possible causes, and many relate to living at least a portion of time in high-risk or nonideal settings where individuals might be more likely to be the victim of a violent crime, motor vehicle accident, and suicide attempt. The increased likelihood of substance abuse in persons with mental disability brings in another set of risk factors such as driving under the influence, being in fights, falls, suicides, and other risk-taking activity.

### ***Systems Organization***

We have discussed each of the major health interventions that contribute to medical conditions that are the cause of death in the U.S. population. In general many of these risk factors can be averted through a good working relationship with a primary care physician, coupled with access to reliable health information and support from a community of friends and family. In many cases, health promotion can be supported and facilitated by mental health providers.

### **Recommendations**

#### ***Background for Recommendations***

In a review of the research prepared for the American College of Mental Health Administration, Mauer and Druss [72] concluded:

A range of strategies appear to be effective in improving linkage with, and quality of, medical care, and improving self-reported health outcomes in groups with higher levels of baseline medical comorbidity.

**Table 2**  
**Strategies to Improve Medical Care in Persons with Serious Mental Disorders: A Continuum of Involvement of Medical Providers**

Strategy	Involvement of Medical Providers	Requirements
Training for patients or staff	Low	Time, training, motivated trainees
Onsite medical consultation	Intermediate	Sufficient flow of patients to support medical consultant
Collaborative care	Intermediate	Regular contact between medical and mental health/addiction staff
Facilitated referral to primary care	High	Adequate community medical resources; mechanism for linkage between the systems

*Source:* [72].

Mauer and Druss [72], who developed the summary in Table 1, described these strategies:

At one end of the continuum, training programs may provide psychiatrists with additional medical training, or patients with expertise in self-management and/or therapeutic lifestyle change strategies. Studies in this area have demonstrated considerable potential to reduce lifestyle risk factors such as poor diet, smoking, and obesity in persons with serious mental illness. In medical consultation models, a part-time or full-time medical consultant comes on-site in the specialty mental health setting to provide for the medical needs for patients. This approach has been tested in several inpatient studies where it has been shown to improve the quality of medical care. Collaborative care models in which care is delivered by multidisciplinary teams made up of both internists and mental health or substance use specialists are analogous to evidence-based approaches to treating depression in primary care. Finally, under facilitated referral models, a mental health facility can hire a care manager to provide linkage and coordinate follow-through with medical care in a community medical setting. These models are among the simplest programs to implement in free-standing mental health settings such as CBHOs, although they depend on the availability of a high quality community medical provider and effective linkages between the MH/SU and primary care provider organizations. [72]

Many CBHO programs work with physician groups in seeking primary care collaborators. Yet another model that has certain advantages includes the integrations of a nurse practitioner who is connected with

a primary care practice setting and “deployed” to a community mental health site. Through this type of model the primary care provider is not professionally isolated and has colleagues that can strengthen coverage and a range of services, equipment, and advantages that are part of group medical practice. The use of nurse practitioners is comparable in terms of outcome for primary care settings [73]. Physician assistants are another level of provider that may be considered. Generally, these providers are not able to function independently and the degree to which proximity to a physician varies by state licensing regulations.

CHCs and CBHOs have partnered in the past to integrate mental health and substance abuse services into CHC primary care settings, consistent with the federal initiative to integrate mental health and substance abuse services into primary care. CBHOs and CHCs have more recently initiated discussions about bringing primary care into mental health settings, where the population with serious mental illness is accustomed to receiving care, building on current research efforts. These efforts have encountered a federal policy barrier.

The Bureau of Primary Health Care (BPHC) Policy Information Notice 2002–07: Scope of Project Policy [74] noted: “It is crucial that health centers request approval for changes of scope in the areas of site and services, and update the BPHC regarding any other changes to the scope of project prior to occurrence” (p. 3). Scope of project is described as having five core elements: services, sites, providers, target population, and service area, and is used to:

- Stipulate what the total approved grant-related project budget supports, inclusive of 330 funding, program income, and other non-300 funds;
- Define the scope of coverage of the Federal Tort Claims Act for providers;
- Define covered entities for the 340B Drug Pricing Program;
- Define approved service delivery sites and services for Medicaid prospective payment calculation; and
- Define approved service delivery sites for CMS determination of Medicare cost-based reimbursement.

In local discussions about the CHC placing a primary care provider employee in the CBHO, with documentation in the CHC chart and billing under the auspices of the CHC, the BPHC Scope of Project policy has come up, and there seems to be variation in understanding the policy and its applicability. The range of perceptions includes the following:

- The CHC cannot place a provider in the CBHO because it would completely jeopardize their 330-funding and FTCA coverage.
- The CHC can place a provider in the CBHO, but only if the site also serves its other target populations, not just the population with serious mental illness—so a separate entry door and waiting area are being created.
- The CHC can place a provider in the CBHO and must file a scope of project change per the Policy Information Notice 2002–07 [74], but anticipates no issues in doing so, other than a six-month wait to get it approved.
- The CHC can place a provider in the CBHO and does not envision that a scope of project change will be necessary because it already outstations providers in a number of sites.

The HRSA/BPHC is currently working on a revision to the Scope of Project policy. Ideally, the policy revision will clarify the appropriateness of placing CHC primary care practitioners in mental health settings, given the data demonstrating that people with serious mental illness are a health-disparities population.

Nationally, discussions on improving the structure and funding of health care include the concept of a medical home. The American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Physicians, and American Osteopathic Association recently released Joint Principles of the Patient-Centered Medical Home [75]. These principles include:

- Personal physician;
- Physician-directed medical practice (team care that collectively takes responsibility for the ongoing care of patients);
- Whole person orientation;
- Care that is coordinated or integrated;
- Quality and safety (including evidence-based care, use of information technology, and performance measurement/quality improvement);
- Enhanced access to care; and
- Payment structure that reflects these characteristics beyond the current encounter-based reimbursement mechanisms.

Related to the payment principle, a team of physicians, including representation from the Commonwealth Fund, has proposed a new payment methodology tied to medical homes. The encounter-based reimbursement system would be replaced by a per-patient payment (a case rate, not

capitation), substantially increasing payments for primary care in return for greater accessibility, quality, safety, and efficiency. Over two-thirds of the payments would be for multidisciplinary health-care teams [76].

The public mental health system must enter into a dialogue with those leading these initiatives to assure that the needs of people with serious mental illness are addressed as a part of improving the structure and funding of health care. We suggest that there are three tiers in organizing services to enhance the health of individuals with mental disabilities in a CBHO.

### *Specific Recommendations for Effective Policy and Practice*

Recommendations stemming from this report are organized into three tiers: (a) those that can be virtually immediately implemented with little additional resources, (b) those that require substantial organizational-level changes and leadership efforts to support, and (c) those that require substantial national leadership and promotion in order to implement.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Initiatives That Can Be Readily Implemented with Minimal Additional Resources*

- Expand the Wellness Recovery Action Plan and plans to address consumer-generated goals for physical well-being including physical activity, nutrition, and primary care.
- Redesign clinical treatment and service plans so that they support recovery that is inclusive of health promoting activities.
- Consumer centers and CBHO staff access existing community health resources and speaker programs, including:
  - Smoking cessation resources from public health departments, local hospitals or groups such as American Lung Association;
  - Diet and weight-related support group resources such as Overeaters Anonymous and commercial programs such as Weight Watchers that are available; and
  - Nutrition information seminars and talks, which might be available to community groups and staff through local public health department or hospital outreach dietitian.
- Include a physical activity component in existing day treatment and other psychosocial rehabilitative programs.
- Restructure the work priorities of any existing nursing staff within

CBHOs so that they can devote time to the physical health aspects of consumers.

- Collaborate with existing national organizations such as the American Lung Association and the American Diabetes Association who have a wealth of health promotion materials and protocols that could be used by people with mental health issues.
- Existing performance improvement project structures within CBHOs can be used to create projects that promote better health screening, monitoring, prompting about smoking cessation and care coordination with primary care providers.
- Ask local county or state medical associations to provide speakers and talks on health risks and to conduct “ask the doctor” sessions to groups of consumers or CBHO staff. Through these connections, offer to provide consumers experience to health care to medical professionals.
- Assure that psychiatric staff have access to continued medical education trainings on contemporary smoking cessation pharmacology and other basic health monitoring courses.
- Include health promotion materials in waiting rooms and create health resource bulletin boards in consumer areas.

*Initiatives That Require Organizational Changes, Leadership, and Resources*

- Contract with a consumer-operated organization to survey the physical health concerns of consumers. This endeavor would include a national snapshot of what consumer-operated programs are currently doing as well as what they would be willing to do. The collaboration should also include having consumers help frame the message and approaches that will encourage and empower consumers to take positive actions in their own lives. Publish this information prominently.
- Encourage state-level leadership to develop health promotion initiatives for individuals with mental and other disabilities. This effort might include members of the department of mental health, department of health, hospital association, state medical association, state nursing associations, state psychiatric and other allied mental health professional organizations, mental health and other concerned advocacy groups, state groups of community behavioral health organizations, statewide consumer organizations, and any other stakeholder with a vested interest in the health of citizens.

- Develop a consumer-run health education training module for consumers to become peer health coaches. This would include training for peers to help other consumers interface with primary care by acting as advocates.
- Utilize Pat Corrigan's [77] contact approach for combating stigma and discrimination to primary care health providers so they can better serve clients with serious mental health issues. Focus on listening and providing physical health care in nonjudgmental ways. Include training for front office staff on how to interact with consumers in a respectful manner. Opportunities can be explored through state medical societies and primary care organizations.
- Develop registered nurse-level nursing positions within CBHOs such that they have time allocated to provide basic teaching on common medical conditions. Such efforts could facilitate screening for basic health problems and help to monitor health treatment.
- Develop on-site primary care services.
- Develop proactive leadership level relationships with local primary care providers that see high numbers of consumers from a particular CBHO.
- As ongoing statements of national significance on recovery are developed and updated, include health as a prominent feature of recovery.

#### *Initiatives That Require National Leadership and Promotion*

- National mental health advocacy groups work together with national medical organizations to promote awareness of the health needs of persons with mental disabilities. Organizations to contact would include:
  - American Medical Association,
  - American Academy of Family Practice,
  - American College of Physicians,
  - American Nurses Association,
  - Association of Clinicians for the Underserved,
  - American Academy for Physicians Assistants, and
  - American Academy of Nurse Practitioners.
- Medicaid and Medicare must become partners in improving access to care, data analysis, and designing and implementing strategies that will be effective with the population served by the public mental health system. Assure financing methods for service improvements.

Include reimbursement for coordination activities, case management, transportation, and other supports to ensure access to physical health care services.

- As a health-care purchaser, Medicaid should:
  - Provide coverage for health education and prevention services (primary prevention) that will reduce or slow the impact of disease for people with serious mental illness;
  - Establish rates adequate to assure access to primary care by persons with mental disability;
  - Cover smoking cessation and weight reduction treatments; and
  - Use community case management to improve engagement with and provide access to preventive and primary care.
- The BPHC within the HRSA is currently working on a revision to Scope of Project policy. Seek to assure that the policy revision will clarify the appropriateness of placing federally qualified health center primary care practitioners in mental health settings, given the data demonstrating the people with serious mental illness are a health disparities population.
- Mental health advocates and professionals must work at the national level to promote the value of an accountable medical home so that every individual with mental disability has a clearly identified and trusted medical home.
- The public mental health system should employ the Institute for Healthcare Improvement model in crafting a national initiative on morbidity and early mortality in people with mental disabilities. This effort could be led by SAMHSA and HRSA together with national advocacy groups that would develop a care improvement program, based on the Institute for Healthcare Improvement model, for addressing the health of individuals with mental disabilities.
- Stakeholders in the mental health community hold one or more meetings with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health to discuss the promotion of health literacy in special and underserved populations.
- Wellness should be tied into the SAMHSA National Consensus Statement on Mental Health Recovery.

## Note

1. See the MacArthur Foundation, Depression in Primary Care Initiative Web site at [www.depression-primarycare.org](http://www.depression-primarycare.org).

2. These recommendations are based on a structure proposed by Kathryn Power in multiple speeches in 2003 as the President's New Freedom Commission's [78] report on transforming the U.S. mental health system was put forth.

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