

## **PSYCHOTHERAPISTS – PERFECTLY POISED TO COLLABORATE WITH PHYSICIANS**

Family therapists are experts at understanding and facilitating change. They know the flexibility required - how systems pull back toward homeostasis and how fear is generated as a group walks reluctantly into uncertainty. Family therapists and other systems trained mental health providers are the most skilled providers to participate in this change. Here are a couple of recent changes in healthcare:

- \* By 2006 75% of all Community Health Centers will have integrated mental health into primary care. There are over 1000 Community Health Clinics, serving over 3,500 communities and 15 million patients.

- \* Mood disorders rank third in healthcare costs, first in work loss costs and second in total costs. The vast majority of people with mood disorders are seen in primary care NOT mental health clinics. Mood disorders, diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and asthma account for 49% of total healthcare costs and 42% of illness-related lost wages.

- \* Several health policy initiatives (nationally and locally), including the Institute of Medicine, emphasize the need for collaborative multidisciplinary services. However, these policy ideas are far ahead of actual practice in most places.

- \* The Institute of Medicine Report: A New Healthy System for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century stated that interdisciplinary healthcare teams should be the central strategy in providing services.

- \* In many states the Mental Health Parity Bill has passed – opening up the opportunity for ease in collaboration and billing between mental and physical health.

- \* Local insurers are encouraging training of physicians and mental health providers in collaboration and integration skills.

Here is a quote from an article printed in the Seattle Times in July originally printed in The Dallas Morning News titled, *Heading off Illnesses: Mind-body connection shown*: “I think increasingly, traditional medicine has begun to adopt the feeling that we have to think of the whole individual,” says Joseph Doster, MD

of the University of North Texas in Denton. “There is a mind-body connection.” Also printed in this same article, “Managed care has really put a constraint on a physician’s ability to understand what’s going on in a patient’s life. Doctors may have to shift that job to others.” ... like medically savvy MFT’s.

July 2002, *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, published research out of the University of California, San Francisco. Researcher Reiner Rugulies examined all of the published work on heart disease and depression. He combined data from 11 of the most statistically sound studies and found, “Overall people who are depressed appear to have about a 60% higher risk of developing heart disease – a magnitude that would make depression about as hazardous to the heart as smoking.”

The majority of these studies reveal how a patient’s worldview, relationships, and beliefs help or hinder health. This mounting pile of research is beginning to change the delivery of medicine as more and more integrated or comprehensive treatment centers arise and more family medicine clinics bring on a psychosocial provider for their patients and families. MFT’s with their extensive training in Family Systems are ideally trained and would likely provide the most effective form of the kind of brief counseling needed in a medical setting.

The shortfall of MFT’s does not lie in their clinical skills, but for many, in their understanding of medical culture – how to adapt pace to that of a medical clinic, to understand and know how to use medical language, how to write a medical chart note, how to briefly and effectively collaborate with an attending physician, how to create a shared mission with physicians, and often, how to mentor a medical staff in integration. MFT’s who would like to provide their clinical expertise in a medical setting, will need this training to design and integrate a collaborative healthcare model into a medical practice. If you would like to work more closely with physicians or increase the referral base to your practice, get yourself ready, for the opportunities are increasing now. CEU courses and a post-graduate certificate in Medical Family Therapy are available in our area. Contact Amanda Hataway at Seattle Pacific University’s Department of Marriage and Family Therapy for more information, [Amanda@spu.edu](mailto:Amanda@spu.edu), or go to <http://www.spu.edu/depts/pfc/mdft/>

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