



Your Doctor & Your Health

**An Integrated Approach to
Physical Health and Mental Health Care**

By County of San Diego Mental Health Services



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Mental health and emotional problems are real, painful and can be severe. They can lead to school failure, loss of friends, loss of work or family conflicts. While some people are still apprehensive about discussing mental health issues, or problems that are affecting their mental health with family or friends, they can discuss them with their primary care doctor. There may also be times that individuals may not be comfortable in discussing with their doctor their feelings, emotional problems or problems in their personal life. However, your primary care physician can treat not only health problems but also mental health problems and conditions such as depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder that may or may not be associated to your physical health condition. Primary care physicians are trained to identify signs and symptoms of mental health conditions. They also can refer you and link you to specialized mental health services when the mental health conditions require intensive outpatient or inpatient care.

In some cases, your primary care doctor or a health care provider on a routine check-up or follow up visits for a physical health condition may ask you about your mood, thoughts or behavior. Your doctor may bring it up during a routine medical appointment if you seem to be sad, nervous or upset, or you may decide to schedule an appointment with your family doctor to talk about your mental or emotional concerns. In most cases the primary care doctor can treat mental health conditions with medication and may refer you for counseling, and other support services. Furthermore, because some mental health conditions may require specialized care that your doctor's office may not provide, you may be referred to a mental health provider, such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, or other clinician for further evaluation and treatment needs not provided by your doctor.

Communication is always a two-way street.

Healthcare providers may ask questions that may seem very personal or that may be embarrassing to you. Try and answer these questions as honest as you can. The only reason they are being asked is to understand your health issues and to make recommendations regarding your care.

It's important for you to be candid and truthful with their doctor. Clear communication between you and your primary doctor is key to quality health care. If feelings of stress, sadness or anxiety are causing physical problems, keeping these feelings inside can make you feel worse and may affect your physical health. If you are having these feelings, you can discuss them with your doctor or health care provider. If your symptoms aren't caused by other health problems, you and your doctor can address the emotional causes of your symptoms. Your doctor may suggest ways to treat your physical symptoms while you work together to improve your emotional health.



Being an active participant in your care can help your efforts to manage your health.

One way to address mental health issues with your primary care provider is by preparing for your appointment. Asking questions is key to good communication with your doctor. If you don't ask he or she may assume that you don't need more information. Think about your needs and goals for treatment. Also, write down a list of questions to ask and be prepared to respond to questions that your doctor may have:

⌘ Your doctor may ask:

- What are your symptoms? How did they start?
- Are your symptoms constant? How often?
- Is anything you are trying making you feel better?
- Do your symptoms affect your daily activities? Which ones and How?

⌘ Questions that you may ask your doctor :

- What may be causing my stress, my lack of sleep, my headaches, nervousness?
- How can my symptoms for depression or anxiety be treated?
- Will counseling help?
- Are there medications that might help?
- How long will treatment last?
- What can I do to help myself?
- Are there any brochures or other printed material that I can take home with me?
- What web sites do you recommend visiting?

In addition to the questions that you've prepared to ask, don't hesitate to ask questions during your appointment when you don't understand something. You and your doctor can decide what is the best treatment for your mental health conditions.

⌘ Questions about your medications that you can ask your doctor

Find out what kind of medication your doctor may recommend. Here are some important questions you may ask .

- What is the name of the medication, and what is it supposed to do?
- How will I know if the medicine is working or not working?
- How and when do I take it, and when do I stop taking it?
- How long will I have to take the medicine?
- Is there any written information available about the medication?
- What are the side effects, and what should I do if they occur?



*An example of integrated health care:
Combined Diabetes and Depression Care Management*

Depression is a condition associated with a variety of other medical problems, including more suffering and physical pain, decreases in physical ability and self-care of chronic illnesses, and a high potential for suicide. It also can significantly increase medical costs. Treating depression is not only important for mental health, it's important for physical illness as well.

According to a study published in the October 2005 issue of *Diabetic Medicine*, more than 40 percent of patients with diabetes worldwide reported poor psychological well-being, with thoughts ranging from fears about the disease worsening to worries that diabetes will make it difficult for them to care for their families.

One study published in the August 2007 issue of *Diabetes Care* concluded that depression in diabetic patients is associated with increased symptoms of diabetes, impaired functioning, higher medical costs, and increased mortality. In addition, patients with depression often have poor self-care, a behavior that can lead to diabetes complications and even death. The research provides added proof that diabetes plays a role in depression and vice versa.

Most researchers found that for patients that are diabetic who have become depressed, anxiety and worry play a central role. This disease is considered chronic, and these patients must think constantly about their diet as well as the possibility of complications, which could include peripheral nerve problems, heart disease and blindness.

The Department of Family and Preventive Medicine at the University of California, San Diego partnered with the San Diego County Adult and Older Adult Mental Health Services, the Council of Community Clinics, and Medi-Cal to enhance treatment for patients with

depression and diabetes. The project expanded Project Dulce, the existing diabetes management program in San Diego County community clinics, to include care management for consumers with diabetes and depression using the Improving Mood-Promoting Access to Collaborative Treatment (IMPACT) model. While Project Dulce and IMPACT have been individually implemented and independently evaluated in the past (showing positive results), this project provided an opportunity to test and evaluate the combination of the two models.

The study conducted by UCSD the University of California, San Diego researchers found that adding a depression care manager to an existing diabetes management team was effective at reducing depressive symptoms at a reasonable cost. This study suggests treatment does make a difference.

Thirty-three percent of patients in a low-income, predominantly Spanish speaking Latino community clinic population had symptoms of major depression. The researchers reported interventions that increase exercise and improve glycemic control may also decrease depressive symptoms in patients with diabetes, pointing to potential positive reinforcing effects of integrating depression care with diabetes management.

The researchers found that the IMPACT model of depression care helped patients who have depression. Patients in the IMPACT program also had improved functioning and quality of life and lower overall medical costs.

Since mental health and physical health are clearly connected there is a need for a collaborative system of care between mental health care and primary health care to improve the services for individuals with mental health conditions.



While professionals in the mental health field are an essential element of the total health care continuum, the majority of patients with mental health issues will continue to access the health care system through primary care physicians. The desire of patients to receive integrated treatment from their primary care physicians, has been repeatedly documented in the literature. A holistic, person centered approach to an individual's health has demonstrated very positive health and mental health outcomes.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), lack of early detection and effective treatment of the range of mental and substance use conditions remains a serious shortcoming of our current medical care system. As integral to overall health, the promotion of mental health, prevention and effective treatment of mental and substance use conditions are central to preserving our health.

Offering solutions and help to improve Your health care and quality of life

The County of San Diego MHSA believes that the concept of wellness is closely tied to the concept of recovery from mental health conditions, and that many of the treatments and interventions that are used to maintain good health also are useful in negotiating recovery from a chronic illness - including mental health conditions and substance abuse conditions.

Since early 2005, the County of San Diego has been conducting an extensive community input process to identify mental health needs and priority populations as a result of the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA). The County's Mental Health Services department has been planning for the Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) component of the MHSA for the past 9 months and has sought community input in a variety of ways including holding community forums, focus groups, key informant interviews and written community input.

The MHSA requires that the PEI programs include early intervention and prevention services that are successful in reducing the duration of untreated mental health conditions to assist individuals in preventing the debilitating effects of untreated mental health problems or conditions, so individuals can lead productive lives. Individuals experiencing onset of a mental health condition or serious psychiatric illness can benefit from early identification and services that will help them get their appropriate treatment. To the extent possible, these services should be integrated with physical health and substance abuse services or coordinated for identification and early intervention.

Primary care providers can conduct mental health screening and assessment for all ages and populations as part of a routine healthcare visit, and, when determined appropriate, provide a warm hand-off to a mental health specialist, who will initiate early interventions or refer to specialty mental health services, along with care management services, until the individual is fully engaged.

Primary care providers (PCPs) play a significant role in screening, assessing and treating trauma-exposed individuals, and have a key role in serving all ages of underserved racial, ethnic, and cultural populations. The PCP setting is an ideal location for identifying anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, or other PTSD symptoms, particularly among populations who may be reluctant to approach traditional mental health providers due to fear of stigma and discrimination, or, as is often the case with trauma, guilt or shame.

A summary of details regarding the community input can be found in the PEI section of the San Diego Network of Care website at: www.sandiego.networkofcare.org

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