

WHY I VOLUNTEER:

Integrated Mental Health and Physical Health Care
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of Mental Health

The brain is a magnificent organ, elegant and resilient, yet also vulnerable to disease, dysfunction and trauma. And when our brain becomes dysfunctional, we can no longer care for the body's organs effectively. When our brain goes awry, we lose strength, communication, stability, and rational understanding, which are required to care for both brain and body. Fortunately, we have excellent treatments for disorders of the brain, and yet with our fractured system of medical care, we create barriers to access for psychiatric treatment.

Unfortunately, we have a long history of separating treatment for disorders of the brain from treatment for other organs of the body. We use separate medical buildings, separate medical records, separate billing procedures, and separate "carved-out" insurers. We communicate poorly among physicians who are all providing healthcare for the same individual. We operate in silos, and the patient must cross the barriers to obtain healthcare for various organs of the head and body. Today we would not design such a fractured system, but we allowed the current state to develop in general healthcare.

How can we integrate mental healthcare with other physical healthcare? The Columbus Medical Association Physician Free Clinic (PFC) stands as a shining example of success. At the PFC, assessment and treatment by all medical specialties occurs collaboratively, in a clinic setting with "one-stop shopping" providing advantages for patients.

To obtain PFC services, each patient makes an appointment. Patients are checked in at the front, and are then seen by the appropriate clinician, based on the chief complaint. If additional physician referrals are needed, the patient may be seen that evening by the appropriate specialist. The various medical specialists and primary care physicians are assigned to a few dozen examination rooms which are arrayed in a square formation around a large nursing station/pharmacy area. Typical specialties represented include a wide variety of primary care and specialty physicians, such as family medicine, internal medicine, neurology, orthopedic surgery, neurosurgery, and psychiatry.

If a physician finds complications or multiple specialty concerns, the physician may chat with a colleague for a quick informal consultation, or may refer the patient for a visit with a colleague a few rooms down the hall. Consultative interactions between physicians are timely, frequent, and informal, with the patient's best interest in mind. Each patient has one medical record, which travels with the patient, as the patient receives healthcare. Lab testing may occur within the clinic, or complicated diagnostic testing and procedures may occur externally.

With subsidized care delivered by volunteers such as physicians, nurses, and clerks, the cost is minimal to staff the clinic. With Columbus Medical Association Foundation and Columbus Health Department support, the setting and logistics are financially covered, allowing for healthcare delivery to those most lacking in personal resources. As we like to comment in the clinic hallways, our PFC patients get better integrated healthcare than most Ohio patients!