Access to Effective Behavioral Health Services for Insured Minority Populations: What Works?

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Presenter Disclosures

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Background

▸ Mental health disparities persist among minority populations almost a decade after the *2001 Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity–A Supplement to Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*

▸ Ethnic minorities still are subject to overt and covert discrimination, negative stereotyping and stressful events that result in a greater burden of some behavioral health problems and lower access to behavioral health services

▸ Even if insured, low SES individuals within minority populations are less likely to seek behavioral health care

▸ When minorities do access and utilize care, the care they receive is not comparable to that received by White subjects with similar insurance coverage

Barriers, Strategies, and Solutions

▸ *Objective:* to review the status of barriers to access to behavioral health services in the last decade; to identify and issue recommendations to overcome such barriers among insured minority populations

▸ *Methods:* We reviewed the body of literature, conducted key informant interviews, and convened a consensus group meeting

▸ *Data Collection:* The instrument gathered information on five (5) domains: 1. *Social context*, 2. *Culture*, 3. *Access*, 4. *System of care*, and 5. *Prevention*

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Social Context

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▸ Findings from the interviews were abstracted and discussed by a consensus group

▸ Racial/ethnic minorities are overly represented in homeless, incarcerated, impoverished, migrant and foster care populations where behavioral health problems, substance abuse and violence are significantly higher than in the general population

Main recommendations:

❖ To enhance partnerships
❖ To acknowledge SES and race/ethnicity contributions to limited access
❖ To support outreach by providers
❖ To build a network of community leaders

Culture

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▸ Cultural issues persist as significant obstacles to effective behavioral health services
▸ For patients, culture influences the understanding of mental health issues and how decisions to seek care are made
▸ For providers, understanding cultural issues helps to inform accurate diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up
▸ **Main recommendations:**
❖ Educate providers
❖ Tailor behavioral health services to populations
❖ Collaborate with public health, social work, psychology, and medical schools
❖ Recruit and train mid-level providers such as community health workers
❖ Increase group case management and relocate services

Access

- Even if insured, minority populations also face barriers to behavioral health service utilization
- Stigma is an issue and is associated with societal views of mistrust of health care providers and economic barriers
- Those who lose their job or move between jobs may lose health benefits
- *Main Recommendations:*
- Increase coverage of populations by working with state agencies
- Develop and implement standardized and evidence-based practices
- Reduce economic, administrative and location barriers to service
- Assure confidentiality to assuage concerns about law enforcement, stigma and mistrust
- Conduct research to assess utilization, adherence to treatment and cost barriers for people of color
- Behavioral health services may be included under the umbrella of wellness programs to avoid stigma

System of Care

- Equity, parity and cultural competence for minority populations are *not* institutionalized within systems of care
- Behavioral health services are fragmented, understaffed and hard to reach by families and the community
- Behavioral health services have been increasingly devolved to the criminal justice system
- *Main Recommendations:*
- Health care providers/agencies should establish the values, principles and guidelines on cultural competency and service delivery for minorities

- Establish financial and service partnerships with public behavioral health agencies, drug and mental health courts, and re-entering populations
- Develop reimbursement strategies which will support the roles of mental health professionals
- Provide incentives for provision of behavioral health services
- Improve health information systems for minorities
- Assess adequacy of pharmacotherapy vs. psychotherapy
- Provide protection against coverage loss in case of job change or loss

Prevention

- Prevention is still given a role secondary to treatment
- Behavioral health promotion and education programs are lacking and not well marketed to minorities
- *Main Recommendations:*
- Develop culturally relevant prevention campaigns designed with input from targeted communities
- Assess wellness programs offered to clients and determine the effectiveness
- Extend prevention programs to family and community
- Previous prevention policies should be explored for private-public funding and pilot tested for market feasibility
- Implement effective mental health screening tools in all primary care settings
- Reorientation of behavioral health services for minority populations with these findings and recommendations has potential to increase access and utilization of services

Collaborators

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