



CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES

ADDRESSING SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS MAY CONTRIBUTE TO PREVENTION OF DISABILITY

Evidence based protocols should be developed and widely disseminated that address social determinants of mental health disorders that can prevent disability.

A briefing was held by “Health Affairs” entitled “Mental Health Care: Better, Not Best.’ Presenters at the forum were behavioral scientists on mental health, renowned psychologists, an administrator from the Veterans Administration, health policy experts, representatives from insurance companies, and a leader of a mental health group.

Summary

There are vulnerable populations that receive inadequate community mental health services. These include seniors (17% of whom are diagnosed with one or more mental health disorders) and people with disability (30% of who are diagnosed with one or more mental health disorders). In addition, nearly 40% of veterans who need treatments for mental health disorders do not receive them, and of those who do, one quarter do not receive treatments commensurate with mental health practice guidelines.

There are many shortcomings in the current provision of mental health services that have been linked to severe consequences. System shortcomings include: 1) unused quality improvement tools 2) inadequate technical assistance for states, 3) disproportionate economic costs of care for the mentally ill (it costs 1-7 times as much to treat mental illness as it does to treat physical illness) and 4) failure of primary care physicians on physical visits to include mental health diagnoses. There are consequences for not treating mental health disorders. For example, work productivity is 1-2 hours less a day in depressed individuals than in others, and one-third of sick days are attributed to mental health disorders and substance abuse conditions.

Disability Prevention Issues

There was little reference to preventing social determinants that lead to diminished mental health. These include: 1) job loss, 2) economic reversals, 3) family and domestic problems, 4) work stress, 5) transition from adolescence to adulthood, and others. There is a need for protocols that can address the prevention of social determinants that lead to diminished mental health conditions. Trauma, fear, anxiety, depression, lack of sleep, suicidal thoughts, drinking, panic attacks, nightmares, flashbacks and other consequences of

mental illness may contribute to diminished health and potentially result in disability.

Intervention

A letter was written to the leadership of a major mental health advocacy group requesting attention to the prevention of social determinants that lead to mental health disorders and the subsequent impact on the prevention of disability.

Recommendation

Evidence based protocols should be developed and widely disseminated that prevent social determinants of mental health disorders.