

Case Study

Reducing ED Utilization for Behavioral Health Patients

At Sturdy Memorial Hospital in Attleboro, Massachusetts, real-time alerts pushed into EHR data feeds connect behavioral health patients with specialized support at the point of care while decreasing demands on ED resources and staff.



We've reduced unnecessary ED utilization among behavioral health patients by 44% by transitioning patients to the right setting for care. Real-time alerts through the EHR give us the basis for better coordinated care, even during a pandemic.

Brian Patel

Senior Vice President for Medical Affairs,
Medical Director & Chief Quality Officer,
Sturdy Memorial Hospital

The Challenge

The emergency department (ED) has long been the point of least resistance for behavioral health services, especially in the middle of the night or on weekends, when other avenues for care are closed. But EDs are ill-equipped to treat these complex health issues. Common challenges include lack of behavioral health training among ED physicians, nurses, and staff to environmental factors, like long wait times and difficulties related to discharge planning. Now, as the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered an increase in behavioral health cases among children and teens as well as adults—with nearly one out of four adults receiving mental health treatment from 2020-2021—hospitals must consider: “How can we ensure ED patients with behavioral health needs receive the appropriate support after discharge?”

At Sturdy Memorial Hospital in Attleboro, Mass., a 126-bed community hospital whose ED records approximately 50,000 patient visits per year, real-time notifications, at the point of care, help staff more effectively pinpoint which patients frequently come to the ED for behavioral health treatment and develop appropriate mechanisms for response.



Sturdy Memorial Hospital has
50,000
patient visits per year

The Solution

Sturdy Memorial partnered with PointClickCare to identify ways to minimize ED boarding for patients at the hospital and more effectively pair patients with local behavioral health expertise. With more adults suffering from behavioral health disorders and more mental health clinicians leaving the healthcare workforce, Massachusetts' behavioral health workforce is in "a state of crisis," according to a Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation report. It's a situation that demands more robust solutions and tighter care coordination with community resources, particularly for smaller hospitals.

Sturdy Memorial began by leveraging real-time notifications pushed directly into the EHR from PointClickCare to rapidly identify behavioral health patients with more than three ED visits—including at other area hospitals—in the past six months. When patients met this criteria, Sturdy Memorial coordinated efforts with a local behavioral health clinical practice, Community Counseling of Bristol County, to assign patients to a dedicated case manager with behavioral health expertise. From there, patients could be assigned to outpatient programs that would help address their mental health needs. Meanwhile, case managers simultaneously worked to address social determinants of health—such as homelessness and transportation barriers—that often contribute to high ED utilization.

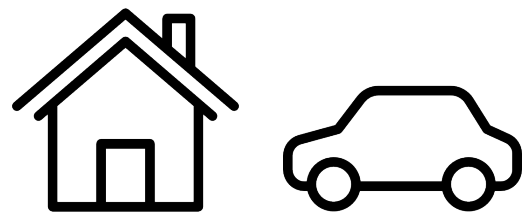
"A lot of what drives behavioral health utilization is social determinants of health," says Brian Patel, Senior Vice President for Medical Affairs, Medical Director & Chief Quality Officer, Sturdy Memorial Hospital. "Issues such as lack of stable housing or transportation and unreliable phone access not only make it difficult for patients to manage their health and health appointments, but also leave people feeling isolated. This can exacerbate mental health issues. It also limits individuals' ability to access the right care at the right time for optimal health."

Community Counseling of Bristol County also uses the PointClickCare platform to monitor hospital and ED utilization by patient. Access to the platform gives providers the most up-to-date contact information for patients, which helps providers reconnect with patients who have been difficult to engage due to unstable housing and lack of phone access.

When a patient targeted for more intensive support arrives in the ED, built-in alerts automatically notify staff that the patient is a high utilizer of behavioral health services in the ED. These alerts also give team members the contact information for the patient's case manager so the case manager may be notified from the start of the ED visit.



Real-time alerts at the point of care push critical information to providers to ensure patients' behavioral health needs are met in the appropriate way," Patel says. "They also empower ED team members to develop a proactive response plan for patients who exhibit familiar patterns of behavior, such as patients who are prone to enter the ED on the weekends, when they are more likely to be alone. With this information in hand, we can establish support mechanisms that address patients' needs before they reach the ED.



Homelessness and transportation barriers
contribute to high ED utilization

Outcomes

The impact of the ED case manager program for patients with behavioral health challenges has been substantial, even during the pandemic, when behavioral health needs have increased, and staff resources have been stretched thin. Today, unnecessary ED utilization by individuals with mental health challenges managed through this program remains 44% lower than the six-month period prior to entering the program. And, because of the social determinants of health component of patient assessment, individuals not only receive better care, but also connections with resources that help meet their whole health needs, from healthy food to transportation to appointments or safe shelter.

“By pairing these patients with individualized support, we can more effectively address their needs while easing pressure on our ED staff to make the right call with limited expertise,” Patel says. “We’re proud to have partnered with PointClickCare on an initiative that improves the health of our population and streamlines access to behavioral health treatment for those who need it most.”

About PointClickCare

PointClickCare is a leading healthcare technology platform enabling meaningful collaboration and access to real-time insights at any stage of a patient’s healthcare journey. PointClickCare’s single platform spans the care continuum, fostering proactive, holistic decision-making and improved outcomes for all. Over 27,000 long-term post-acute care providers, and 2,700 hospitals use PointClickCare today, enabling care collaboration and value-based care delivery for millions of lives across North America.



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