



Behavioral Health: Making the Connection between Physical and Mental Wellness

Screening for Pediatric Behavioral Health Needs

Family First Health uses evidence-based screening tools like the PHQ-9 to screen all patients in areas such as substance use, depression and social determinants of health. The PHQ-9 is a 9-question screening tool given to patients 12 years and older at visits with their primary care provider.

“Our current model already utilizes tools for individuals ages 12 and older, but we need one for children ages 5-11,” explains Liz Leen, Behavioral Health Program Manager. “After months of research and not finding an existing tool that fits our needs, we decided to create our own and are currently in a data collection phase.”

The Pediatric Screening Tool evaluates how children feel using six emotions: Love, Fighting, Scared, Angry, Happy, and Sad.

Initially designed to identify warm handoffs for behavioral health, this pediatric screening tool has proven beneficial in addressing overall care delivery. Family First Health is working with the Penn State University EPIS (Evidence-Based Prevention & Intervention Support) program to identify next steps in the research process to publish and share our findings.

Family First Health utilizes an integrated services model – a team approach that coordinates primary and behavioral health care – to improve medical outcomes and overall patient wellness.

Behavioral health, which encompasses behaviors, emotions, and social interactions, is crucial for overall wellness. Research shows a strong connection between behavioral health and physical health. Individuals with mental wellness are more likely to have lower rates of chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.

Family First Health’s Integrated Services model provides on-site access to service for patients with medical, substance abuse, and behavioral health concerns. Using a team approach, medical and behavioral health staff work together with patients to provide comprehensive care designed to meet individual needs with a focus on improving overall health outcomes. Integrating behavioral health services as part of their medical home at Family First Health eliminates the need for patients to find care in a variety of settings in the community and helps reduce stigma that can be associated with treatment.

Having on-site behavioral health means immediate, same-day access to a master’s level behavioral health provider. The behavioral health provider is part of the patient’s care team and focuses on the connection between mental health and physical wellness. The behavioral health team also links patients to necessary outside supports related to treatment and recovery, including drug and alcohol counseling and mental health treatment, while also addressing social needs such as transportation, insurance, and housing.

Behavioral health was added to our primary medical services in 2015, with a focus on mental health and treating depression in adults. Today, behavioral health services are provided onsite at all of Family First Health’s medical locations and include patients 12 years and older. During 2023, our team provided support and treatment during 4,306 visits to 1,310 patients in the communities we serve.

Making a Difference: Affecting Behavioral Changes to Improve Primary Care Outcomes

Many people are too nervous to talk about making behavioral changes during a health care visit. Being offered and asking for support comes with many benefits though. Timely interventions for mental health conditions can help prevent or reduce the severity of an illness and improve a person's quality of life.



Cora's Story. Cora is a 27-year-old mother of 3 (11, 8, and 1 ½) and is the full-time caretaker for her mother, who had a debilitating stroke last year. Cora was overwhelmed with things in her life and experiencing outbursts of anger. She recently started blood pressure medication for a new diagnosis of hypertension.

Cora met with our behavioral health provider and identified that she wasn't setting boundaries, saying "yes" to too many things, and not giving herself time to decompress; she would go from one task to the next until she would explode with rage that no one was helping her.

Over subsequent visits, she started identifying ways to ask for help from her family, learning to say "no," and setting 30 minutes per day aside for her personal needs. Behavioral Health services discharged Cora with a referral to our health and wellness coach to continue addressing her hypertension.

Theresa's Story. Theresa is a patient who has a serious mental health condition and was discharged from her outpatient psychiatrist for missing too many appointments. Individuals with serious mental illness often struggle with keeping scheduled appointments; as a result, Theresa was out of her mental health medication and needed refills.

Theresa's primary care physician was able to refill her medications and connect her to Behavioral Health services. A behavioral health consultant was able to work with her on medication adherence and behavioral interventions for symptom management, and connected her with our psychiatrist for ongoing medication management.



Our behavioral health providers assist with symptom management in addition to helping with health behavior and lifestyle modifications to improve the management of chronic physical health conditions.

Cora and Theresa are just two of the Family First Health patients for whom our integrated services approach has engaged them as active members of their individual health care teams, helping them to recognize and address behavioral issues in ways that are improving their overall health outcomes and quality of life.

Perspectives and Notes

"How wonderful is it to receive behavioral health services at your primary care office? I love that our behavioral health specialists are able to step in an exam room and see a patient the same day as their medical appointment when needed." - Marie Kellett, MD, Clinical Lead, Integrated Behavioral Health Services, Family First Health

"Family First Health's model improves early detection and management of behavioral health issues, decreases stigma and ensures continuity of care. This ultimately contributes to a more effective and holistic healthcare system for our patients and those who are most in need." - Cory Erhard, Director of Integrated Services, Family First Health

Why I Give: Donor Spotlight

Meet Dr. Go.

From the moment she decided to pursue a career in health, Dr. Go knew her role would be one in a community setting. Her plan upon completing her family medicine residency in New York was to return home to the Philippines and become “a village doctor.”

Dr. Go’s plans changed, however, when she received a call with an opportunity to become part of the medical team for a community health center in York, PA.

That was 25 years ago. Working as a primary care physician in a York, she saw and experienced on a daily basis the importance of access to affordable, quality health care, as well as the impact of health disparities faced by members of the community in which she now lives and has come to call home. Her career path with Family First Health has led her to a position where her experiences now inform the management of a regional medical services team – one that is firmly grounded in community health.

Dr. Go notes that healthy communities attract businesses that provide pathways for people to become productive members of their communities. Non-profit organizations like Family First Health are critical to the development of healthy communities, and financial support from businesses and individuals – like her – allows them to continue this important work.

And as she sees it, giving is also a gift to yourself: “It helps make room for you to receive and to understand the difference one person can make.”

Thank you, Dr. Go. We continue to make a difference because of you!

Asceline Go, MD currently works as Vice President of Medical Services for Family First Health, and has been a loyal donor since 2013. In addition to her leadership role she maintains a patient panel as a health care provider, and as a certified HIV specialist, she is the lead physician for our Caring Together program.



Coming Fall 2024!

Family First Health at William Penn Senior High School is scheduled to open at the beginning of the school year! To learn more about the center and how you can contribute to make a difference, visit our campaign page at <https://www.familyfirsthealth.org/william-penn-campaign>

Your gift can make a difference.

Ways to Give:

- **Check:** Mail your check, payable to *Family First Health*, to: Development, Family First Health, 116 S. George Street, York PA 17401
- **Credit Card:** Make your secure donation online via our web site at: www.familyfirsthealth.org/donate
- **Consider a recurring monthly gift.** Make your support have ongoing impact with an automated credit card contribution.

Questions?

Contact David Corman, Manager of Donor Relations, at 717-801-4850 or dcorman@familyfirsthealth.org



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Our Mission

WHAT WE DO

We improve lives; in **big ways** and **small ways**. From high quality health services and innovative partnerships to daily acts of compassion. In all ways, **we work together** to improve lives.

Our Vision

WHY WE DO IT

From healthcare to health for all

Closing the gap
Paving the way
Raising the bar

Our Values

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Patient Centered
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