



CHILD MENTAL HEALTH FOR PRIMARY CARE

Collaboration with Behavioral Health Providers

Do you feel as if your behavioral health referral went into a “black hole” and you never get updates on the patient you referred? Read below for some tips on how to successfully collaborate with behavioral health providers.

Suggestions for Successful Referrals

- Ask the patient to sign a release and receipt of information for the therapist or behavioral health provider when you refer. However, take it a step further and fax or send over that document at the same time the referral is made so that the therapist simultaneously knows they have a referral and permission to talk to the referring provider. They will also be able to confirm when an appointment is made.
- You could have an office administrator or referral specialist contact the behavioral health office ahead of time to understand their process. For example, it may be that the behavioral health office does not call the patients, but waits for the patient to initiate the intake. Having a release and receipt of information may make this process easier and perhaps a conversation between offices can clarify the most helpful referral process.
- If you can establish some working relationships with a consistent set of providers in the area, that will help personalize the referral to “Ms. Sandra Thompson, LCSW” rather than “A behavioral health agency.”
- When making a referral, provide as much clarity around the reason for referral as possible. If it is general clinical distress, that is okay, but any specificity provided will be helpful to the behavioral health clinician.
- Specify on the release and receipt of information form the type of information you are requesting. The type of information you want, as a provider, will likely vary depending on the patient and the situation. For example, for some patients you may only want to know their appointment attendance or perhaps even that they simply scheduled a first appointment. Other patients you may want a diagnosis or additional psychosocial assessment, and still other patients you may want a therapist’s full clinical assessment.
- Consider how you present the idea of a behavioral health referral to a family and patient. Some helpful strategies include the normalization of these types of services, the potential for short duration, the knowledge that you will communicate with the therapist if the family wishes, and that you hope they come back to your office to follow up.

Suggestions Continued

- When making the referral provide some indication of the patient's willingness to accept the referral.
- If the patient is hesitant to receive behavioral health services, consider proposing a time-limited number of sessions rather than an indefinite "attend therapy." Employ motivational interviewing or problem-solving skills to help the patient feel a level of investment and clarity around participating in therapy.
- The more information you can provide a behavioral health therapist regarding the reason for the referral the better. In fact, you may have already tried a variety of interventions which would be helpful to share in the referral.

A Note on Confidentiality

Understand that HIPAA is less restrictive than a behavioral health provider's code of ethics. A behavioral health provider's code of ethics likely means that they need additional documents in place to even confirm that a patient has scheduled an appointment.



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