

Taking a Closer Look at Psychological Services in a Skilled Nursing Facility

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Background

University psychologists have long served as resident educators in the Department of Internal Medicine, supporting resident development of psychosocial interview skills through direct observation of patient interactions. However, university psychologists have not previously provided direct patient care at Highland Hospital or the Highlands at Brighton (HAB).

Unsurprisingly, the prevalence of psychiatric disorders in long-term care settings is high. A systematic review showed 10% of patients in long-term care settings met criteria for major depressive disorder, 29% had depressive symptoms, 58% had dementia, and 785 of patients with dementia had reported behavioral problems; despite this, psychological/behavioral treatment is infrequently implemented (Seitz, Purandare, & Conn, 2010).

In light of this, the American Psychological Association recommends interdisciplinary health care as the new standard for high-quality patient care in long-term care settings. Psychologists work within interdisciplinary teams to help treat psychiatric symptoms through assessment, treatment planning, and discharge planning.

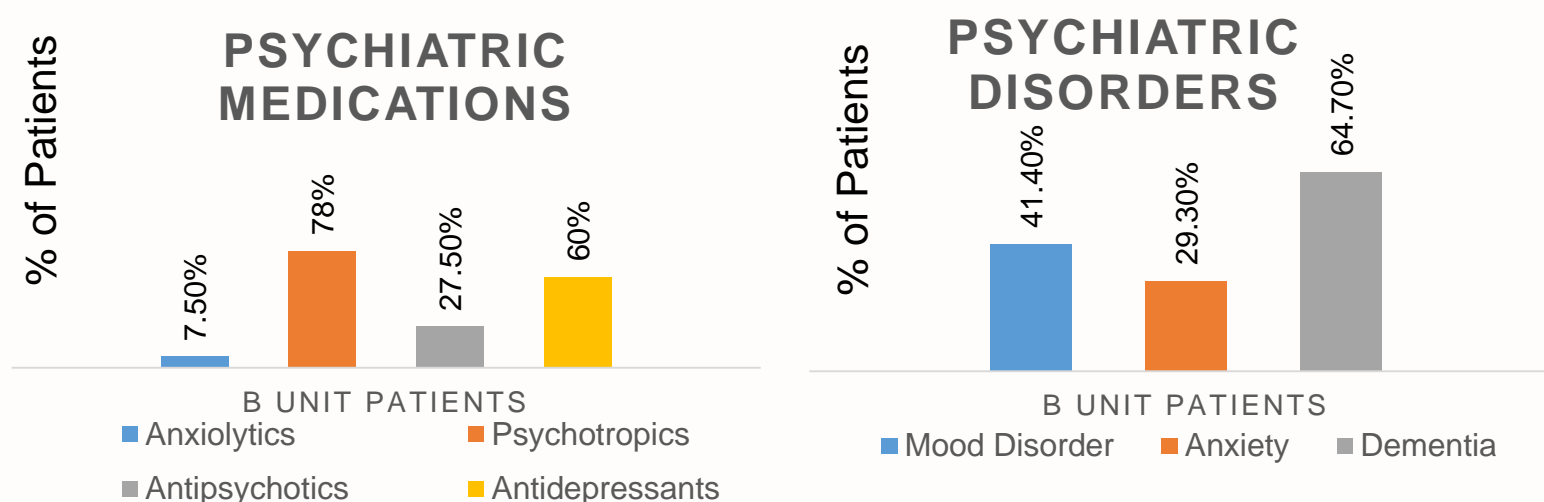
A needs assessment was conducted to identify potential benefits of expanding psychological services at HAB to a more interdisciplinary approach to improve quality of care on the long-term care unit.

Highlands at Brighton

- HAB is a multi-unit skilled nursing facility that provides transitional care to patients with a wide variety of medical conditions and is the primary skilled nursing destination for medically, socially and behaviorally complex patients discharged from URMH hospitals.
- Current psychological services: contracted psychologist who visits 1-2x per week, psychiatry consult liaison team for medication management/recommendations.

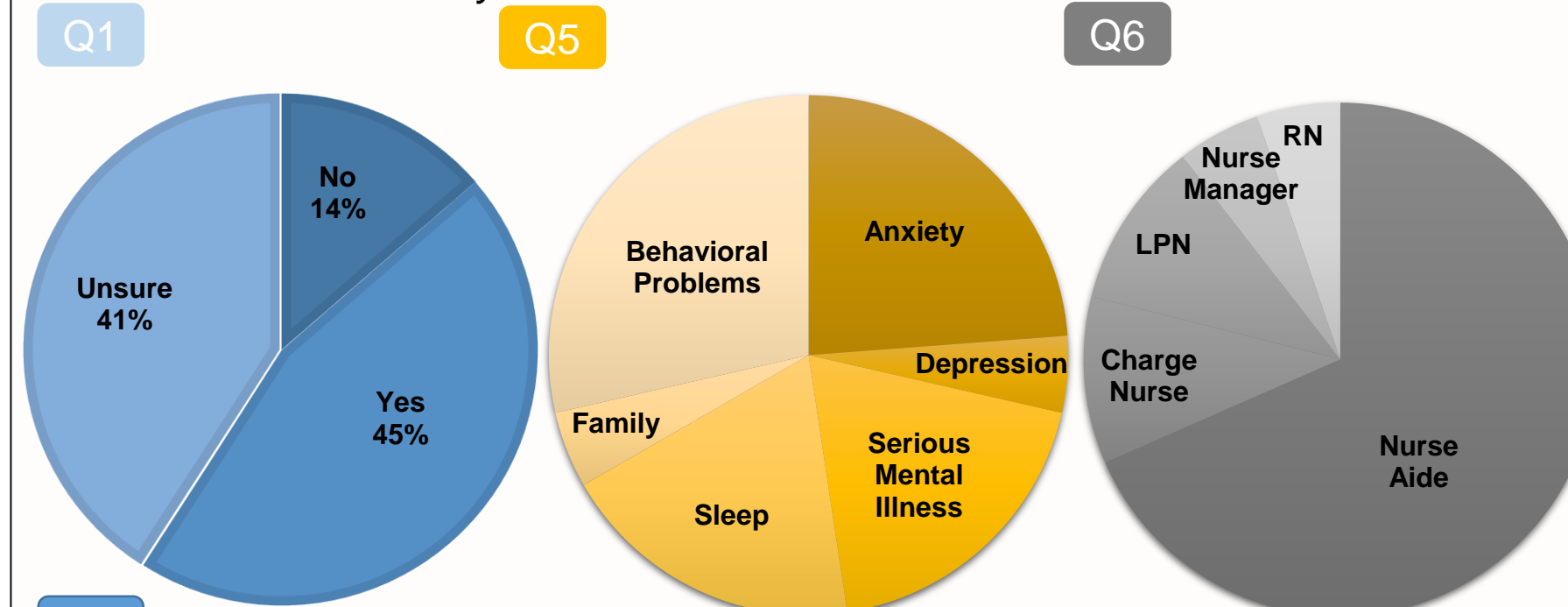
Patient Demographics (May 2018- May 2019):

Length of Stay	Females	Males	Medicare	Medicaid
275.75	302	267	13.42%	70.95%



Needs Assessment

- A survey was distributed to patient care staff on the LTC unit. There were 22 respondents, 2 respondents did not complete the second half of the survey, and only 7 respondents correctly rank-ordered responses to Q5
 - Q1:** To the best of your knowledge, are there psychological services available for residents at HAB?
 - Q3:** HAB would benefit from additional psychological services to address the following needs
 - Q5:** Which concerns do you find most difficult to manage/would benefit more from psychology service?
 - Q6:** What is your role within HAB?



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Improved quality of care for patients and families	71%	19%	5%	0%	5%
Increase collaboration to help staff manage behavioral health concerns	77%	9%	9%	0%	5%
Educational in-services for staff (i.e. de-escalation strategies, communication with difficult patients, overview of common psychiatric diagnoses)	76%	14%	5%	0%	5%
Improved job satisfaction for staff	68%	18%	5%	0%	9%

- Preliminary interviews with nurse managers and patients were conducted to inform the survey. This process revealed an unclear referral system, a different documentation system with unclear information recorded, and subsequent difficulty interpreting documentation.
- Patients revealed satisfaction with the psychological services regarding quality of services, length of visit time, and frequency of sessions.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the staff at Highlands at Brighton for their cooperation in data collection and support of expanding services to improve the patient care experience.



Discussion

- Although the patients are satisfied with the current psychological services, there are several limitations to a contracted psychologist including utilization of a different record system, minimal opportunities to provide integrated care, as well as a lack of communication regarding recommendations to help reduce distressing patient behaviors.
- This breakdown of communication was made clear by the number of respondents who were unaware of the availability of psychological services at HAB (Q1 Chart).
- The results of this needs assessment indicated that expansion of psychological services would be beneficial with additional emphasis on evaluating and training staff in responding to psychological needs.
- There were several limitations to this study including a small sample of respondents limited to one unit of the skilled nursing facility, with majority of respondents identifying as nurse aides. However, this unit was identified as a unit with potentially higher need and interest for psychological services.

Future Directions

- Psychologists trained in geriatrics, caregiving, and transitions of care represent a small portion of our workforce (Hoge et al, 2016). Subsequently a stepwise plan has been offered to support integration of psychology into this setting over time.
- Aim to improve staff satisfaction: provide monthly in-services to staff members to increase knowledge of psychosocial factors, enhance effective communication with patients, and provide emotional support to staff members.
- Aim to improve patient treatment: provide direct care to patients 1 full day a week (i.e. assessment, psychotherapy, and collaboration with patient-care teams regarding treatment planning and discharge planning); participate in interdisciplinary and resident/family meetings to help support residents and staff, and to improve staff communication skills.

***References available upon request.