



Building the Pediatric Primary Care Mental Health Workforce: The Pediatric Primary Care Mental Health Specialist



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Background

It has been nearly 20 years since the Surgeon General called upon pediatric primary care providers (PCPs) to expand their scope of practice to attend to the mental health needs of children and adolescents.¹ Since then, many providers have obtained increased training in mental health care. However, wide variability continues to exist, and inadequate access to mental health care for children remains a problem.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to provide the basis for a new specialty certification examination for advanced practice nurses in pediatric primary mental health care: **PMHS**.

Methodology

In 2009, the PNCB launched a national survey and role delineation study (practice analysis) to validate the importance and relevance to practice of broad content areas and tasks related to the delivery of pediatric mental health care within primary care.² (A second national survey is currently in process which will examine whether any changes have occurred in this role in the past six years.)

Results

Nearly 300 health care providers widely dispersed across the country described the range, frequency and scope of activities that became the basis for the Pediatric Primary Care Mental Health Specialist role. Today there are over 350 specialty trained and certified Pediatric and Family Nurse Practitioners with the Pediatric Mental Health Specialist certification (PMHS).

Exemplar #1

A PNP in rural Maryland works at a pediatric practice in a region with a 3- to 5-month waiting list to be seen by a psychiatrist. She provides screening and psychoeducation, helping families understand and cope with behavioral concerns. She frequently collaborates with community partners and the school system. She has provided the practice and the community with an additional resource for pediatric behavioral/mental health. Her presence in the practice has attracted many new families seeking care. They are currently seeing to expand their practice by adding another PMHS.

Exemplar #2

A PNP who owns and operates a specialty clinic in Oregon provides care for children from birth to late adolescence with a variety of developmental and behavioral concerns. Using a family-centered approach, she also supports parenting skills, assists in access to services and resources, and promotes understanding of the rights of parents of children with special needs. As a PMHS, she perceives increased respect from professionals in her region and reports an increase in referrals from physicians and other mental health professionals.

Exemplar #3

An APRN holding both FNP and PMHCNS roles works at a large pediatric practice in rural Pennsylvania where evaluation, treatment, and safety assessments are provided for ADHD, depression, anxiety disorders, tic disorders, and autism. She provides pharmacotherapy and brief psychosocial interventions and reports that the PMHS credential communicates her unique expertise and increases family confidence. This successful model was originally begun in collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh Child & Adolescent Training Program.

Conclusions

The PMHS certification provides formal recognition of a post advanced practice nursing certification specialty in child and adolescent mental and behavioral health and is consistent with the Consensus on Advanced Practice Nursing. This new role strongly supports the early involvement of the primary health care provider in both the promotion of mental health as well as early intervention within the pediatric health care home. The **PMHS** certification of over 350 advanced practice nurses in this specialty marks a significant step in improving critical access to mental health for children in this country.³

References:

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3. Pediatric Nursing Certification Board. Pediatric Mental Health Specialist Certification Exam. http://www.pncb.org/ptistore/control/exams/mh/pmhs_role. Retrieved November 11, 2016.

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