



THE EXPERTS SPEAK

COVID-19 AND THE IMPACT ON BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



On Monday March 16, 2020, Owl Insights, the leading provider of precision care management technology for behavioral health (BH), convened a teleconference with national behavioral health experts to discuss COVID-19 and the impact on behavioral health. The two may not seem directly related, but the anxiety and mental health issues exacerbated by this pandemic are palpable as recognized by the panel and the nation.

Participants included:

- **Randy Axelrod, MD**, Former Executive Vice President of Clinical Services for Providence Health & Services
- **Tom Insel, MD**, Mental Health Czar, California; NIMH Director (2002-2013); Google Fellow
- **Patrick Kennedy**, Founder of the Kennedy Forum; Co-founder of One Mind
- **Alan Schatzberg, MD**, Director, Mood Disorders Center, Stanford Medical School; Past President, American Psychiatric Association
- **Arpan Waghray, MD**, System Medical Director, Telepsychiatry, Providence Health & Services
- Jason Washburn, PhD, Psychologist, Northwestern University

Highlights of the conversation included:

Telehealth—a Critical Strategy for Behavioral Health

All participants conveyed that it is essential to ramp up telehealth services to support not only the triage process for infectious disease risks and medical concerns but equally the psychosocial issues associated with these conditions. This care delivery approach has the potential to address the shortage in access to care as well as risks associated with in-person treatment. The need for telehealth has been clear for some time, but many health systems have been caught unprepared and CMS has been slow to approve it as a reimbursable service making this crisis even more problematic.

With the Anticipated Surge in Telehealth – Quality of Behavioral Health Care Cannot be Compromised

All acknowledged the value of increasing telehealth services to meet the new reality in care delivery requirements. Key considerations,

though, were highlighted with this care model: (a) how best to ensure quality of care; (b) how best to capture clinical outcomes as means to document care; and (c) how best to ensure consistency of care. Measurement-based care was highlighted as a critical instrument to address these key requirements as telemed/telepsych services are scaled and proliferate.

Latent Impact on Addiction & Substance Use Disorder

COVID-19 has the potential to create enormous strain on the effort to treat addiction and for those in recovery. Patients struggling with substance use disorder (SUD) require connection. As of this week, Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous as well as Alanon, a 12-Step program supporting families and loved ones, are not able to convene in person with regular scheduled meetings. Although those in recovery are transitioning to virtual meetings, patients new to treatment may not survive to find other options.

Provider Exhaustion

Clinician and staff exhaustion are of significant concern given the high level of diligence required to take care of patients in intensive care. Mitigating staff burnout is paramount to manage access to care issues. The cost to replace and train staff is excessive. There is a need to monitor the medical providers and staff for distress and deliver appropriate supportive care.

Behavioral Health (BH) on the Backburner

It was also recognized that more often than not, BH is put on the backburner in a crisis. However, given that major metropolitan areas (e.g. San Francisco, Seattle, New York) are already overwhelmed with the homeless crisis, the imminent risk for that population accelerating the spread of COVID-19 is real and must be addressed by state, city, and local municipalities.

Where Do We Go from Here?

Technology platforms like Owl Insights support remote monitoring and virtual care. This care model will be essential as health care adapts to serve the population in the most efficient and safe manner while maintaining quality and continuity of care. Although progress has been made, it is clear that the healthcare system has a long way to go to be able to monitor BH patients remotely and deliver more patient-centric care.

Owl Insights supports both on-site and virtual care delivery to help healthcare providers manage these challenges and the increased demand on behavioral health services. The Owl supports remote screening & monitoring of patients BH conditions alongside telehealth initiatives at scale. In addition, The Owl now includes a screening bundle for the detection of COVID-19 and its psycho-social impact on the patient.

About Owl Insights

Owl Insights, Inc., is the leading provider of precision care management technology for behavioral health (BH). Through its advanced platform, affectionately termed “The Owl”, the company offers a scalable strategy to integrate measurement-based care and clinical analytics into existing BH treatment workflows covering all major behavioral health conditions. Owl Insights supports health systems and independent BH organizations nationwide to expand access, improve quality care delivery, better manage costs and support the preparation for value-based care.

For more information on Owl Insights Precision Care Management Platform visit <https://www.owlinsights.com/>, or, call 800.910.6769.

