

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

APRIL 2, 2020

INTERNAL HOSPITAL OPERATIONS

Outcome

Members are increasing use of telehealth and have instituted many preventative measures when treating behavioral health patients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Main Points of Discussion

- Most members shared that their organizations are prioritizing private rooms. Many are converting semi-private rooms to private rooms.
- Members have increased their use of telehealth for patient encounters. They have been able to do this because of relaxed regulations associated with telehealth waivers. One system reported that 80 percent of their encounters are now done virtually.
- Adventist Health is creating a 12 bed, COVID-positive unit for behavioral health patients considered to be “walking ill”. If patients are medically compromised, they will be treated on the medical side of the hospital.
- Other measures mentioned included screening staff before entering facilities, more social distancing (e.g., spacing chairs further apart), increased rigor with isolating PUI until test results are confirmed, cleaning all surfaces hourly, keeping patients in their rooms, and requiring patients to wear masks to the extent possible.

MHA Next Steps

- Members asked for clarification about telehealth expansion and reimbursement policies, particularly about audio-only telephonic encounters. MHA staff agreed to send the following which are attached:
 - The [Maryland Department of Health guidance](#) on how to interpret and implement Gov. Hogan's March 20th Executive Order which authorized the reimbursement of audio-only health care services, including behavioral health,
 - The [Behavioral Health Administration's March 24th clarification](#) in response to questions about MDH's guidance,
 - The [letter MHA wrote to the Maryland Insurance Administration](#) urging them to encourage private payers to cover these services.
- Members can reference the latest in behavioral health guidance in the “Resources for Healthcare Providers” section of MHA’s Coronavirus/COVID-19 Update Center:
<https://www.mhaonline.org/resources/coronavirus/health-care-providers>

REFERRALS

Outcome

Access to crisis beds is uneven. While most members are not experiencing issue, however access is limited in Montgomery County.

Main Points of Discussion

- Holy Cross reports that Montgomery County is lacking crisis beds. Crisis bed centers are restricting access through recent changes to admission criteria. One center is requiring a 10-day hospital stay and not accepting patients from the emergency department. Other members were not having that issue in their communities.
- On April 6th, Sheppard Pratt is going live with a virtual crisis walk-in clinic to any individual living Maryland in need of psychiatric triage and referrals. MHA members may access this resource to help people avoid the emergency rooms.

MHA Next Steps

- For more information on Sheppard Pratt's virtual crisis walk in clinic, see the attached flyer, or this link: <https://www.sheppardpratt.org/care-finder/virtual-crisis-walk-in-clinic/>