

Health Matters – March 2010

A New Approach for Treating Depression

Many Americans suffer from mental conditions such as depression. According to the Center for Disease Control and prevention, studies show these health problems and illnesses affect about 1 in 5 Americans. There is an innovative program for treating depression that is helping patients recover much faster than they do under typical treatment. The DIAMOND (Depression Improvement Across Minnesota, Offering a New Direction) program changes the way depression care is delivered.

DIAMOND uses a team-based approach to offer more support to the patient. The team includes the primary care doctor, a care manager who interacts with the patient on an ongoing basis, and a consulting psychiatrist available to advise on treatment.

“We’re excited to offer this program in our community because it has been proven to significantly increase the number of patients with depression who recover within six months,” said Dr. Jeff Virant, the physician champion for DIAMOND at Stillwater Medical Group. “Among DIAMOND patients statewide who were contacted six months after entering the program, 43 percent had recovered and an additional 13 percent of patients reported at least a 50 percent improvement in the severity of their depression symptoms. These are significantly better results than we see with patients receiving typical primary care treatment.”

The DIAMOND program was launched by the Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement (ICSI), a non-profit organization that seeks solutions to improve the quality and lower the cost of health care. DIAMOND is now offered through 45 clinics across Minnesota.

DIAMOND was based on almost 40 research studies, most notably the IMPACT study conducted by Jurgen Unutzer, University of Washington. DIAMOND adopts the following six components of the IMPACT model: 1) a validated screening tool to determine if a patient is depressed; 2) a registry to track patient progress toward improvement; 3) evidence-based guidelines to ensure proper care is administered; 4) a relapse program to help prevent a recovered patient from falling back into depression; 5) a care manager; and 6) a consulting psychiatrist.

The diagnosis of depression is established by the patient’s primary care provider who refers the patient to the DIAMOND program and continues to oversee the patient’s care. Additional care is provided through the DIAMOND program. “The care manager and consulting psychiatrist are key to the program,” said Dr. Virant. “The care manager educates and empowers the patient, and monitors and coordinates all their care. The consulting psychiatrist reviews all the patient cases with the care manager on a weekly basis so if a patient isn’t improving, another course of treatment can be used. Patients simply respond better to this comprehensive and caring approach.”

DIAMOND is available at all of the Stillwater Medical Group clinic locations. To find out more about the program, contact Karen Amezcua, Quality Improvement, at (651) 430-4577.