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Spotlight

APP consultants focus on behaviors that make, or keep, us sick

As health care workers, we're aware that a balanced diet, exercise and managing stress go far in preventing chronic diseases. As patients, well, that can be another matter. We know we shouldn't take that second slice of cake or binge-watch "Game of Thrones" while our bike sits in the garage, but we do it anyway.

It's that gap between knowing and doing that is associated with countless preventable health conditions, and creates an enormous burden on the health care system and practicing providers.

Asante Physician Partners hopes to bridge that gap with behavioral health consultants embedded in primary care clinics.

Over the past two years, 11 licensed clinical social workers and clinical social work associates have joined APP internal and family medicine clinics. In April, psychologist Michael Bachop, PhD, was named medical director of APP's new Integrated Behavioral Health program.

The program is part of the medical home model in which patient care is shared by a team with specialized areas of focus, allowing the physician or advanced practitioner to concentrate on medical care.

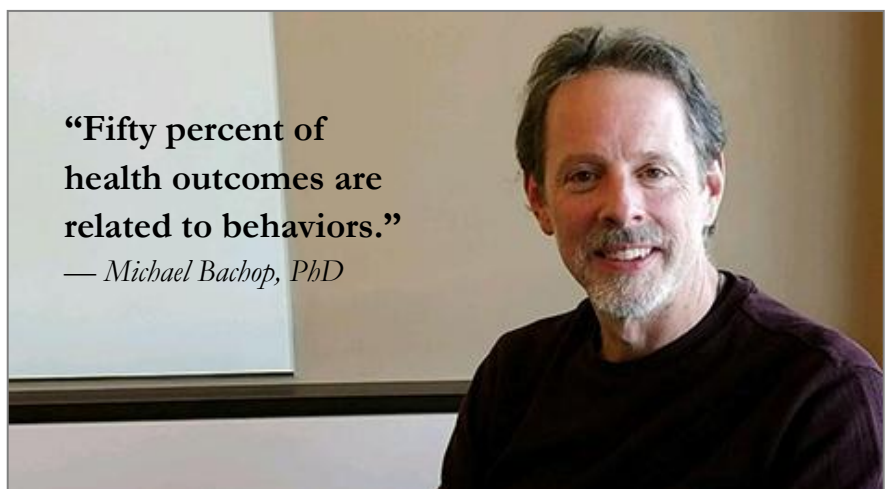
Although "behavioral health" is often used in the context of mental illness or disorders, the term covers a spectrum of behaviors, including those everyday choices that impede or even sabotage our physical well-being.

"Fifty percent of health outcomes are related to behaviors," said Bachop, a clinical psychologist with broad experience helping patients in the primary care setting. "Do you have a healthy diet? Do you have physical activity that keeps you in good shape? Do you smoke? If you drink, do you drink in moderation? Do you take medicine as prescribed? Do you have a good way of handling stress? Do you have a social support network? Those determinants are things that behavioral health counseling can address."

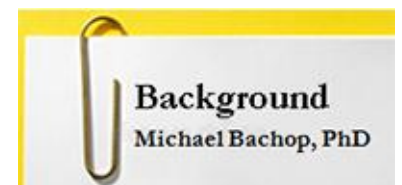
Unlike traditional mental health services that involve long-term therapy, integrated behavioral health is designed for brief interventions — 15 to 20 minutes in the clinic (after a handoff by the provider) with two to three follow-up visits.

The consultant does a quick assessment and comes up with some incremental solutions. If, for example, a patient is suffering anxiety that is sapping his motivation to take care of himself, the counselor may ask how the patient coped with anxiety in the past. If the answer is that the patient had a strong social circle that no longer exists, the counselor may suggest that he contact two or three of those old friends before the follow-up visit. The counselor may also provide breathing, relaxation and mindfulness techniques.

"Small bits of homework keeps momentum going and sets the patient up for success," Bachop said.



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— Michael Bachop, PhD



Medical director, Integrated Behavioral Health, 2017-present, APP

Clinical psychologist, 2017-present, APP–Behavioral Health

Primary care psychologist, 2013-2017, Samaritan Health Services, Lebanon, Oregon

EDUCATION

Postdoctoral fellowship, forensic psychology, Harvard Medical School

PhD, clinical psychology, Columbia University

Predoctoral fellowship, Yale University School of Medicine

MS, clinical psychology, Columbia University

Although research about the influence that integrated behavioral health has on health outcomes is scant, one [study](#) published in the Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine found promise for patients with depression. More than 80 percent of patients' condition had improved as a result of behavioral health interventions, which equipped them with new coping skills.

APP's behavioral health consultants are Autumn Henry Darwish, Alma Hadsidedic, Neil Nicholson, Adrienne Miller, Nancy Ross, Tamara Ulrey, Robert Nutting, Laura Maitrejean, Valerie Neck, Debra Wilson and Ann Higby. They practice in primary care clinics in Ashland, Grants Pass, Medford, Talent and White City.

Working with the larger care team of providers, nurses and medical assistants, they seek out patients who are at risk of developing a chronic condition such as diabetes or hypertension, or those whose existing condition may worsen without intervention. Behavioral health consultants talk about the importance of following the provider's treatment plan and taking medications as prescribed. Or they may work with patients who have chronic pain, depression or substance abuse. They also can connect patients with outside resources.

"If we can target these at-risk folks and do some quick interventions," Bachop said, "we will effect some positive change in that population and make the community at large healthier."

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