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Improving efficiency and access to mental health care: combining integrated care and advanced access

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Abstract

Objective

To provide an example of implementation of a new program that enhances access to mental health care in primary care.

Method

A general and specialized mental health service was redesigned to introduce open access to comprehensive mental health care in a primary care clinic. Key variables measured before and after implementation of the clinic included numbers of completed referrals, waiting time for appointments and clinic productivity.

Workload and pre/post-implementation waiting time data were gathered through a computerized electronic monitoring system.

Results

Waiting time for new appointments was shortened from a mean of 33 days to 19 min. Clinician productivity and evaluations of new referrals more than doubled. These improvements have been sustained for 4 years.

Conclusion

Moving mental health services into primary care, initiating open access and increasing use of technological aids led to dramatic improvements in access to mental health care and efficient use of resources. Implementation and sustainability of the program were enhanced by using a quality improvement approach.



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Keywords

Open access; Mental health; Integrated care; Primary care

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