

Depression Screening and Treatment

Tips for Primary Care Offices

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends that depression screening be performed for all patients 12 and over as long as the practice has an appropriate system in place to assure accurate diagnosis, effective treatment and follow-up¹. (MVP covers treatment of depression and other Behavioral Health conditions provided by PCPs when billed using E&M CPT codes.) Below are some components of office systems for recognizing and treating depression that primary care practices have successfully implemented.

Use of Support Staff

- Performing the screening using standardized questions and scoring it for the clinician. The PHQ tool* is an example of a tool that is brief and easy to administer and score.
- Providing education to the patient including side effects of medications to watch for and when to notify the clinician.
- Scheduling follow-up visits and reviewing expectations with patient.
- Assisting with referrals to specialized behavioral health treatment.

Monitoring Patient Progress

Patients placed on an antidepressant medication should have at least three follow-up visits with a practitioner within the first 12 weeks of being placed on medication. At least one visit should be with the prescribing practitioner. Keep a flow sheet toward the front of a patient's chart to document depression scores and symptoms can serve as a reminder for key aspects of care that should take place at follow-up visits:

- Re-assessing the diagnosis.
- Monitoring depression severity and patient function.
- Making changes in treatment, if applicable.

Coordinating Specialized Care

Depressed individuals are often unmotivated to seek help and may not follow through with recommendations. Thus, it is important that the clinician set up a process to ensure:

- The patient was able to obtain an appointment within a reasonable timeframe.
- The patient attends the scheduled appointment.
- Pertinent communication takes place between the PCP and specialist.

Additional Support for Primary Care Providers

For our New York practitioners, ValueOptions offers a **toll-free Physician Consult Line** staffed by Board Certified Psychiatrists. These psychiatrists are available for telephonic consultation regarding all aspects of mental health and substance abuse treatment for children and adults, including appropriate use of psychotropic medications. The consult line is a valuable tool in educating PCPs on how to screen for and manage patients with depression as well as answer specific questions. PCP's as well as Specialists may contact the **ValueOptions PCP Line for consultation at 1-877-241-5575, Monday through Friday between the hours of 8am to 5pm EST.**

*To download the PHQ-9 tool and scoring please visit our Provider Quality Improvement Manual located:
<http://www.mvphealthcare.com/provider/>

¹ U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. *Screening and Treatment for Major Depressive Disorder in Children and Adolescents: Recommendation Statement*. March 2009.

<http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf09/depression/chdepr.htm>