

Behavioral health patients challenged our emergency department.

“We have about 150 behavioral health admissions per month, about 70 percent coming from the emergency department. So you can see how important the consultation liaison service has been to improving the care our emergency department patients receive,” says Lourdes G. Griffin, Ph.D., Washington Hospital Center Behavioral Health Services.

Challenge

Washington Hospital Center in Washington, D.C., is a busy urban health care complex. In 2009, the emergency department experienced 82,000 visits. A significant number of these patients presented with psychiatric issues. For many urban hospitals, appropriately assessing and treating these patients is a daily challenge. But, thanks to Washington Hospital Center’s vision in 1997 to provide improved care for patients with behavioral health issues, an agreement was forged with Diamond Healthcare Corporation, to develop and manage inpatient and outpatient services. Diamond began with a 40-bed inpatient unit and minimal outpatient services. Prior to Diamond’s involvement, the emergency department’s psychiatric patient needs had been managed by the physician on-call, often resulting in long delays before appropriate assessment and treatment were initiated.

Solution

In 1999, the Hospital Center and Diamond began a formalized consultation liaison service in its emergency department to better serve patients with behavioral health issues. An inpatient admissions office was started and Diamond staff began to manage the requests for psychiatric consults in the emergency department.

Today, Diamond’s behavioral health staff manages programs, completes patient assessments for inpatient admissions, outpatient referrals and provides evaluations for walk-ins. “These patients arrive in our emergency department due to a number of reasons: they may be accompanied by family who has encouraged them to seek treatment, they may have been referred to us by community agencies, or they self-refer and come in alone,” says Lourdes G. Griffin, Ph.D., executive director of Washington Hospital Center’s Behavioral Health Services.

Washington Hospital Center Washington, D.C.

Washington Hospital Center is a 926-bed major teaching hospital and a member of the MedStar Health System. It is the largest private, not-for-profit hospital in the nation’s capital, among the largest hospitals in the mid-Atlantic region and a major referral center for the most complex tertiary services. It consistently ranks among the nation’s top hospitals as recognized in U.S. News & World Report. The Hospital Center is a national leader in the research, diagnosis and treatment of cardiovascular and kidney disease, stroke, cancer, endocrine disorders, and geriatric and respiratory care. The Hospital Center maintains affiliations with several area medical schools including Georgetown University School of Medicine and trains more than 300 medical residents and fellows each year.

“Our staff of licensed psychologists and social workers is usually able to assess patients within 60 minutes after receiving the request for the consult from the emergency department,” says Griffin. “In addition to triaging the patient’s condition, we immediately began coordinating coverage of the patient’s care by verifying his or her insurance and obtaining authorizations from managed care companies. This has enabled us to improve the quality of care the patient receives and shortens the time from admission to treatment.”

Results

Washington Hospital Center’s relationship with Diamond began long before Diamond became a VHA contracted supplier. Griffin points out that because the Hospital Center and Diamond have been working together for 13 years, improvements have developed over time.

In 2008, when Diamond joined VHA’s supplier portfolio, the hospital immediately received benefits. “Not only is Diamond able to provide industry-leading behavioral health services at reduced rates, we have also been able to decrease the time psychiatric patients have to wait in the

emergency department for assessment and treatment,” says Griffin. “Because our assessments are thorough and accurate, the triage process has enabled us to improve the flow of patients through the emergency department, freeing up limited resources. Our process also supports the hospital’s focus on improving patient safety and strengthening risk management efforts.”

Because of its urban city location, Washington Hospital Center’s emergency department and trauma center are extremely busy. “We have about 150 behavioral health admissions per month, about 70 percent coming from the emergency department,” says Griffin. “So, you can see how important the service developed by Diamond has been to improving the care our emergency department patients receive.”

Washington Hospital Center’s success with Diamond’s emergency department program has enabled the program to agree to secure a separate room for assessing psychiatric patients. “Knowing the tremendous demand for space in the emergency department, we feel this validates the value of what we provide to this group of patients and to the overall service the Hospital Center is able to provide to the community,” says Griffin.



Founded in 1985, Diamond Healthcare Corporation is the national leader in the planning, development and operation of high-quality behavioral health services in partnership with health care organizations. Diamond offers a comprehensive range of health care services, including behavioral health services; child, adolescent, adult and geriatric psychiatric services; sleep and pulmonary services; and employee assistance programs.

For more information, please contact VHA at 800.842.5146 or vhacustomerservice@vha.com.

