Integrated Health Care

Issues

* Medical doctors (such as primary care doctors) are not knowledgeable or comfortable in monitoring and managing psychiatric medications to some degree; they need to be able to do so.
* Providers need to understand what is required in the ACA to qualify as a “health home.” Behavioral health providers are eligible to qualify as health homes if they meet the requirements. Care coordination among a team of providers is needed, but that team may be “virtual” (ACA language), not necessarily all in one physical location.
* Providers need to understand the role and structure of Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs). It is important that behavioral health providers get their “foot in the door” to be a part of ACOs as they develop.
* Planning is crucial in establishing integrated care partnerships. (Interest was expressed in getting information about/support for planning.)
* Building a strong relationship among partner agencies, across all levels of staff and leadership, is crucial.
* It is important that integrated care be a core value across the agency. An initial “champion” can play a key role, but sustainability requires participation across the agency. Otherwise, leadership/staff changes can derail integration efforts.
* Bridging organizational cultures is an important consideration. Even the language used by behavioral health care and primary care providers can be different (for example, “client” versus “patient”). It can be useful to come up with a fresh approach/new language.
* Measuring outcomes for integrated care is a consideration. Standard outcome measurements (physical and behavioral health indicators) can be used, but measuring improvements in something like “quality of life” is more difficult.
* Electronic health records can be a major facilitator for care coordination. The ability for providers to access and share information this way is an important consideration.
* Co-location in and of itself is not integration. Coordination of care is essential. Bi-directional integration is important.
* Workforce development is essential for integrated health care, both in terms of numbers of providers and in terms of appropriate training for integrated care.
* Various successful approaches have been used to integrate care. Gathering information, seeing successful practices in action, etc., is important to select an approach that is viable and appropriate for the particular circumstances.
* Financial considerations including billing constraints can be an obstacle. It is advisable to think in terms of “the community’s money.”
* If partnering with an FQHC, change of scope is important to consider. Start to look into this early, as it can take a long time.

Questions

* Will ACO’s create competition for or push small providers out of the way? [Smaller providers can participate in ACO’s. ACO’s are “large scale” in terms of the scope of the network, but smaller provider organizations can participate.]
* What are ACOs? How do they work? What effect will they have? Etc. [Some of this is defined, but there are still unanswered questions.]
* What measurements are people using to gauge outcomes with integrated care? [Wide range. Physical and behavioral health indicators can be used. The IHC community is interested in what other kinds of measures may be possible to look at improvements more broadly – for example, “quality of life.”]
* How do the organizations bill when there is a partnership? [No single answer, but it is useful to think about which organization can leverage a higher rate for the service. For example, an FQHC can bill at the enhanced Medicaid rate. If one organization can leverage a higher rate, it may be beneficial for that organization to bill, even when staff from the other organization provides the service, and then have a contract in place to bring some of the funding back to the other organization. See billing worksheet (“Interim Financing Solutions for Integrated Health Care in Texas”).]
* What is important to consider in planning for integrated health care? [Some of the important considerations are discussed above.]