Benefits of Technology-Enabled Care Coordination in Mental Health Care Delivery

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Abstract

Mental illness is a significant concern around the globe due to its high potential to cause disability and mortality. Also, mental health illness contributes to adverse medical outcomes due to the nonadherence behavior of care options, which leads to high healthcare costs. Yet the world of mental health care delivery is fragmented, which makes it difficult for health care providers to navigate the systems to provide adequate coordinated care for one who is in need; therefore, significant adverse outcomes are experienced in mental health care delivery. Although there are efforts from federal and state agencies to connect fragmented mental health service delivery, there are only minimal results in delivering holistic, coordinated quality care (Iorfino et al., 2021). Therefore, the author wants to explore the benefits of incorporating technology-enabled care into mental health care delivery systems to improve efficiency in providing coordinated quality care.

Introduction

The United States encounters substantial challenges in meeting mental healthcare needs due to the complex system dynamics. The demand for psychiatrists is projected to rise by 2025, with an estimated shortage ranging from 6,090-15,600 psychiatrists needed to meet the care needs in the United States (Falconer et al., 2018). Furthermore, the country is not graduating enough psychiatrists, and the current psychiatric workforce is not well distributed according to the population's needs, especially in their subspecialty areas where the demand is high, such as child psychiatry, geriatric, and addiction (Aggarwal et al., 2022). The shortages of the workforce and system complexities are leaving the population with mental health issues in vulnerable situations besides insurance and other care access issues, which further highlights the need for systems reforms to meet the care demands of the population. In response to growing psychiatrist shortages, mental health care delivery challenges, and the care needs in the U.S., technology-enabled care (TEC) offers promising solutions to meet the demand. Tools such as telemedicine, mobile health, and AI-driven mental health assessments can bridge the gaps in care, enhance care accessibility, and strain the limited workforce.

Technology-enabled care (TEC) refers to various electronic and digital services that provide care, including telehealth, telecare, electronic health services, and mobile (m-health) services. These aim to enhance access to health care, support remote patient care in rural and underserved areas, and streamline communication between providers and patients (Leonardsen et al., 2020). The nature of mental illness's corresponding chronicity and the potential to cause disability and enormous hospitalizations with increased risk of self-harm, suicidality, and other comorbidities requires a multidisciplinary approach to prevent adverse outcomes with timely and appropriate treatment modalities (Iorfino et al., 2021). An interdisciplinary approach requires collaborative care models where the service providers must connect for thorough assessments, intervention, monitoring, treatment plans, and referrals to enhance treatment engagement, satisfaction, and mental health outcomes (Iorfino et al., 2021).

The integrated use of digital and electronic health services increases the ability of the care teams to provide quality care services—increasing care accessibility, scalability, and standardization with effective technology implementation and federal-level system reforms can further drive digitalized healthcare where it can offer broader quality services, especially in remote areas (Iorfino et al., 2021). The adoption of telehealth and technology-enabled care was evident during the pandemic, as infection control measures disrupted onsite access to healthcare facilities. These technologies provide an essential alternative for maintaining the continuity of care delivery while ensuring patient and provider safety (Wosik et al., 2020). The pandemic enhanced telehealth integration into conventional healthcare systems and highlighted the potential for long-term use and the need for vast system expansion (Mann et al., 2020).

Furthermore, although there are federal initiatives to address gaps in mental health care services via technology-enabled care and meaningful investments, adopting and accelerating widespread integration of technology-enabled care to improve the quality of services may require addressing underlying issues in current care models. Without addressing the core challenges, technology adoption digitizes the problem rather than solving it. When the core system inefficiencies in mental health care are addressed, and

technology-enabled care is fully implemented and adopted by patients and providers, it provides the most desirable outcomes in mental health. According to Iorfino et al. (2021), when technology-enabled care coordination is fully implemented, and it's at full potential in mental health systems, studies highlight that it allows healthcare providers to reduce suicide risk by 25% and lower the treatment relapse rates by 30%. Further, it improves service access by 36%, helps to reduce waiting times by 20%, and enhances overall care coordination by 70%, contributing to more efficient and effective mental health service delivery.

In conclusion, technology-enabled care coordination may rapidly become embedded in mental health care due to its benefits, as highlighted in this paper, drawing attention to staff training, data privacy, and security. The diverse range of care professionals and frontline staff must be trained constantly as their roles are expanding, and organizations must have comprehensive professional development and training programs for the leadership and the frontline critical staff. Furthermore, robust data security systems are essential to maintaining privacy and security as the frequency of data breaches in the healthcare industry continues to rise. Also, strong security measures are suggested as patients and staff increasingly navigate a fluid environment of digitalized healthcare platforms.

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