Youth Mental Health Screening and Linkage to Care

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One Mind, in partnership with Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, convened several virtual meetings of mental health researchers, clinicians, and other stakeholders in 2020 to identify first steps toward creating an initiative for early screening and linkage to care for youths (individuals in early adolescence through early adulthood, ages 10-24 years) with mental health difficulties, including serious mental illness, in the United States. This article synthesizes and builds on discussions from those meetings by outlining and recommending potential steps and considerations for the development and integration of a novel measurement-based screening process in youth-facing school and medical settings to increase early identification of mental health needs and linkage to evidence-based care. Meeting attendees agreed on an initiative incorporating a staged assessment process that includes a first-stage brief screener for several domains of psychopathology. Individuals who meet threshold criteria on the first-stage screener would then complete an interview, a second-stage in-depth screening, or both. Screening must be followed by recommendations and linkage to an appropriate level of evidence-based care based on acuity of symptoms endorsed during the staged assessment. Meeting attendees proposed steps and discussed additional considerations for creating the first nationwide initiative for screening and linkage to care, an initiative that could transform access of youths to mental health screening and care.

Journal:

Psychiatric Services
Authors: Jami Young