Mental Health Conditions Among Hospitalized Children

Statement of Problem

Over the past decade, the prevalence of mental health diagnoses has been rising among children seeking short-term medical care for a serious condition. Mental health conditions, such as anxiety, ADHD and depression, affect at least one in 10 U.S. children hospitalized for a medical condition or surgical procedure.

Despite increasing recognition that mental health conditions are common among hospitalized children, hospitals report challenges ensuring adequate mental health resources for their patients. In addition, families and clinical teams aren't always on the same page about caring for mental health conditions, which can lead to further complications in diagnosing and treating these conditions. Understanding the need for mental health resources and ensuring those resources are available for hospitalized children is critical to improving physical and mental health outcomes and the value of pediatric hospital care.

Description

Dr. Stephanie Doupnik is working to better understand the relationship between hospitalization and mental health conditions in children. Over the past few years, she has built a research portfolio that provides a comprehensive picture of the many ways in which mental health conditions affect health care delivery, utilization, costs and outcomes for children, including by putting children at higher risk of the following:

- Medical Complications During Hospitalization: One study examined the influence of mental health conditions on hospital outcomes among children hospitalized for pneumonia and found that mood or anxiety disorders were associated with more medical complications and longer hospital stays.
- Readmissions: Children with mental health conditions were more likely to be readmitted to the hospital within 30 days of discharge after a medical hospitalization or surgical procedure compared to children without mental health conditions.
- Health Care Utilization and Costs: Another study showed that hospitalized children with comorbid mental health conditions had much longer hospital stays, which resulted in higher costs for the hospitals and health systems.
- Clinical Team and Family Communication: One study found that hospital staff and families may not be on the same page regarding mental health concerns and diagnoses in children. This may lead to missed opportunities to identify and provide treatments for children with mental illness.

Hospitals are testing innovative models for ensuring that children with mental health conditions and their families receive the evidence-based treatments and psychosocial support. Efforts include changes to physician training, integrating medical and psychosocial care, and programs designed to support parents. Ensuring the long-term success of care models that integrate behavioral health care into acute hospital care will require systems to monitor whether behavioral health services improve patient outcomes, for example by reducing the length of their hospital stay or the need for subsequent repeat hospitalizations, or by improving their functioning after they leave the hospital. Future work to investigate cost-effective payment models will also enhance the uptake of behavioral health integration within inpatient settings.

Next Steps

We will continue to build evidence for policies, programs and practices to improve patients' outcomes by making mental health services available to children and adolescents in hospital settings.

This project page was last updated in September 2019.

Suggested Citation

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, PolicyLab. *Mental Health Conditions Among Hospitalized Children* [Online]. Available at: http://www.policylab.chop.edu [Accessed: plug in date accessed here].

PolicyLab Leads

Stephanie Doupnik
Stephanie Doupnik
MD, MSHP
Faculty Scholar
Diana Worsley

Team

Evan Dalton
Chris Feudtner
Steve Marcus

Project Contact

Stephanie Doupnik
DoupnikS@email.chop.edu

Related Tools & Publications

Adolescents' Experiences During "Boarding" Hospitalization While Awaiting Inpatient Psychiatric Treatment Following Suicidal Ideation or Suicide Attempt
Article
Oct 2019

Behavioral Health Webinar Series
Webinars
Apr 2019

Behavioral Health: A Snapshot of a PolicyLab Research Portfolio

Tools and Memos
Aug 2025

Beyond Mental Health Crisis Stabilization in Emergency Departments and Acute Care Hospitals
Article
Apr 2018

Caregiver Experiences During their Child's Acute Medical Hospitalization for a Mental Health Crisis
Article
Mar 2022

Catching up to the Crisis: Opportunities for Pediatric Hospitals to Improve Children's Access to Mental Health Services
Article
Feb 2019

Characteristics, Disposition, and Outcomes of Children Hospitalized for Mental Health Boarding at a Children's Hospital
Article
Dec 2023

ED Visits and Readmissions After Follow-up for Mental Health Hospitalization
Article
May 2020

Exploring the Effects of Pediatric Mental Health Boarding on Adolescents, Their Families and Health Care Providers
Research at a Glance
May 2024

Hospitalization Outcomes for Rural Children with Mental Health Conditions
Article
Sep 2020

Mental Health Conditions and Medical and Surgical Hospital Utilization
Article
Nov 2016

Mental Health Conditions and Symptoms in Pediatric Hospitalizations: A Single-Center Point Prevalence Study
Article
Mar 2017

Mental Health Conditions and Unplanned Hospital Readmissions in Children

Article
Jul 2018

Postacute Care after Pediatric Hospitalizations for a Primary Mental Health Condition
Article
Dec 2017

Readmissions after Pediatric Hospitalization for Suicide Ideation and Suicide Attempt
Article
Nov 2018

The Influence of Comorbid Mood and Anxiety Disorders on Outcomes of Pediatric Patients Hospitalized for Pneumonia
Article
Mar 2016

Trends in Pediatric Emergency Department Visits for Mental Health Conditions and Disposition by Presence of a Psychiatric Unit
Article
Jun 2019