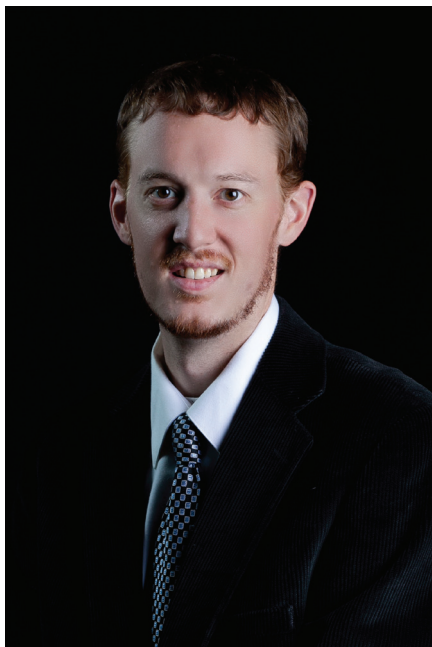


## The Importance of Screening Medical Patients for Behavioral Health Issues

**By Jeremy Senske, PsyD**  
*Psychologist*  
*UBC, Inc.*



People seeking medical treatment in hospitals, healthcare clinics and in primary care settings often have behavioral health needs that are inadequately addressed. Discussing behavioral health issues in medical settings can ensure that patients are receiving proper care that addresses psychological conditions which may be interfering with medical interventions and treatment. Proper screening of a patient's potential behavioral health needs may generate appropriate referrals to behavioral health specialists, such as psycholo-

gists, psychiatrists, and counselors, when necessary to ensure that all of their needs are being addressed in a more interdisciplinary fashion.

Behavioral health services are widely accepted and recommended as effective treatment for conditions such as depression, anxiety, interpersonal issues, and other psychological conditions. Many individuals with medical conditions or chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, cancer and chronic pain, often suffer from comorbid depression and anxiety. In fact, 25% of individuals with chronic or severe medical illness will develop Major Depressive Disorder in their lifetime (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Gender is often also a factor, for example twice as many women with diabetes have symptoms of anxiety or depression compared to their male counterparts (Grigsby, Anderson, Freedland, Clouse, & Lustman, 2002). A study done by Strine, Champman, Balluz and Mokdad (2010) found that inadequate emotional and social support is a major risk factor for adverse health behaviors and disability. Emotional health has also been associated with positive stress management and overall physical health (Richards,

Campania & Muse-Burke, 2010). It is imperative that initial medical assessments address emotional and behavioral health issues in order to provide appropriate referrals for successful treatment.

UBC, Inc. (United Backcare) offers comprehensive behavioral health services to the community and also provides them as an integral part of interdisciplinary care for the management of chronic pain. Behavioral health services often encompass a wide variety of interventions, evaluations and assessments. Pre-surgical psychological assessments can help identify patients who may have psychological or psychosocial conditions that can impact compliance with the surgical procedure and/or follow up care. Opioid dependency screening and treatment can assist individuals in tapering off of narcotic medications, while also adjusting to lifestyle changes. Personality, cognitive and neuropsychological assessments can identify factors that may impact an individual's psychological, social, interpersonal, or occupational functioning in order to provide appropriate interventions and recommendations for further treatment. Telehealth services can provide psychological treatment to

those who cannot make it to traditional office appointments or reside in remote areas. Behavioral health consultations with other clinicians and care providers facilitate ongoing dialogue between members of different disciplines in order to provide comprehensive and interdisciplinary treatment. Social and interpersonal factors must also be taken into consideration, as many medical conditions are chronic, invisible and unpredictable, making support groups for chronic medical conditions beneficial. As psychological treatments continue to advance and become more specialized in the healthcare field, ongoing psychosocial research is also essential to behavioral health services. Internships, practicum and fellowships also provide opportunities for future psychologists, counselors, and clinicians to obtain experience providing psychological services within a multidisciplinary setting.

Adequate behavioral health screening and treatment also provides a number of financial benefits to the individual and society overall. Be-

havioral health treatment has been associated with reduced medical costs for some populations, as well as leading to an overall reduction in subsequent medical service use (Anderson & Estee, 2002). Palak, Cummings, Dorken & Henke (1994) found that the use of managed mental health treatment was associated with a 20% decline in medical costs for those clients who received it. These managed mental health clients used the emergency room less, spent less time in the hospital, and received fewer controlled drug prescriptions. Many counties in Washington State have implemented mental health programs, such as PACT (Program for Assertive Community Treatment), which provide comprehensive and collaborative mental health services to the community. Results of these programs reveal substantial reductions in community and state hospital days (Anderson & Estee, 2002).

As we continue to advance medical science in theory, practice and treatment, it becomes increasingly important that we also utilize the avail-

ability of behavioral health services for these reasons. Behavioral health services are a necessary part of interdisciplinary care and can lead to increased health and quality of life in patients, reduce the burden of care to the medical community, and lead to comprehensive and cost-effective treatment for society as a whole.

*Dr. Senske is a licensed psychologist in Washington State. His background includes working with individuals with psychosis, unipolar and bipolar depression, anxiety, chronic pain, as well as experience working with individuals in acute crisis situations. His interests lie in cognitive-behavior therapy for chronic pain and psychological and neuropsychological assessment.*

*Dr. Senske has been in the clinical psychology field since 2004. Four of those years were spent in the community mental health field providing clinical services to severely emotionally disturbed adults as well as individuals who were in crisis. He is also an adjunct professor for Argosy University's counseling program.*

***Reprinted with permission from the Washington Healthcare News. To learn more about the Washington Healthcare News visit [wahcnews.com](http://wahcnews.com).***