

Mental health impacts all practices

Clarence Chou, MD

A physician's practice frequently deals with the issue of mental disease, whether it is apparent through the words and actions of the patient or manifested through physical symptoms, difficulty in treatment compliance, or disruptive behaviors.

Patients with mental disorders utilize a significant amount of the medical resources and time of physicians and their staff when their conditions are not recognized.

The World Health Organization has listed several mental disorders among the top 10 health issues with the greatest impact in terms of cost and morbidity. The Department of Health and Human Services' recent survey noted that mental diseases were the third fastest rising area of cost in health care (also due to an increase in the number of cases diagnosed with

mental disorders) for all medical conditions. A recent *Forbes* magazine article noted that 73% of all prescriptions for anti-depressants were written by family practitioners, general practitioners, and internists. It has been reported that a significant number of suicidal patients saw their personal physicians immediately prior to an episode of self harm. I was reminded of a case presented in grand rounds several years ago, where a man with generalized anxiety disorder with panic attacks was seen by multiple physicians in multiple settings, receiving numerous extensive diagnostic evaluations. As the professor tallied the cost of the various tests, he remarked that the amount spent for this individual could pay for treatment of all persons with anxiety disorder in the state of Wisconsin for one year. Clearly, the issue of mental disease impacts all practices and the health care system, as noted in the previous examples.

In psychiatry, a thorough history, careful physical examination, and appropriate laboratory and other diagnostic tests are all part of the evaluation to rule out other physiologic causes of the

mental disorder. Other types of practices, which are quickly becoming the front line for dealing with mental disease, need similarly well-thought out processes to ensure that patients are being dealt with as appropriately and thoroughly as possible. Because of the rapid advances in the field of neurobiology, the connections between psychiatry and other branches of medicine are stronger than ever.

This issue of the *Wisconsin Medical Journal*, on the topic mental health and disease, includes a series of articles written by your colleagues on various aspects of mental health. It is to be used as a guide and/or a stimulus to clinical considerations by the physician who deals with mental disease in his or her practice. Hopefully, you will find worthwhile information to raise your awareness of how to deal with mental illness in your practice, regardless of your specialty.

Doctor Chou is a child and adolescent psychiatrist and medical director of the Milwaukee County Child-Adolescent Inpatient Service and Wraparound Milwaukee. He is also an assistant clinical professor for Medical College of Wisconsin. He is the current chairman of the Mental Health Association.