

**Collaborative Care Project  
Healthcare Partners  
1999 Acclaim Award Honoree**

HealthCare Partners successfully integrated behavioral health care into the primary care setting. They realized that the gulf between behavioral health and primary care created difficulties for patients. By co-locating the two specialties, providing forums for them to meet and discuss cases, and reporting SF-36 health data to providers, HealthCare Partners was able to improve patient care and reduce inappropriate utilization.

**Goal**

To identify and treat patients with depression and other psychosocial issues in the primary care setting.

**Intervention**

Behavioral health care was integrated into the primary care setting. SF-36 health status data was used to identify the levels of distress among the patients. Those recommended for counseling were walked to the office of the behavioral health specialist on site and either seen immediately or scheduled for an appointment.

**Highlights**

- Behavioral health providers were relocated to the primary care site, thereby providing patients with an opportunity for immediate and timely attention.
- Primary care providers were trained on using SF-36 health data to determine those patients at risk.
- Patients were mailed the SF-36 Questionnaire and asked to bring the completed survey to their visit. Reminder calls were made the night before the appointment.
- Completed survey data were entered into the computer for use during the visit.
- "Hallway Hand-off" (walking patients over to meet the behavioral specialists) helped remove barriers and dispel taboos associated with psychosocial care.
- Monthly Collaborative Care forums allowed PCPs and behavioral specialists to discuss case studies and provide ongoing mutual education.

**Results**

- The program increased sensitivity and skill in the treatment of psychosocial issues for primary care providers, and increased sensitivity to medical issues for behavioral specialists.
- Improved identification of distress.
- Improved treatment practices.
- Increased number of collaborative conversations.
- Improved clinical outcomes.
- Decreased inappropriate utilization for patients reporting low mental health scores.
- Increased patient and provider satisfaction.

*HealthCare Partners, located in Torrance, California, was founded in 1994 as a result of a merger of three multispecialty groups. Ninety-four percent of the organization's patient population is managed care. Collaborative Care is currently in place at 18 of the organization's 30 sites.*