



Harris County Hospital District

Media Contact: Connie Chavez
Office: 713-566-4370
Cell: 713-240-6484
Connie_Chavez@hchd.tmc.edu
On-call pager: 713-566-6430

NEWS RELEASE

Hospital District's Psychiatry Program Honored Nationally

Community-based program is largest of its kind, serves as national model

HOUSTON (Oct. 12, 2007) – The Harris County Hospital District's Community Behavioral Health Program (CBHP) has received the 2007 Gold Award for community-based programs from the American Psychiatric Association.

The award is given to one mental health program nationwide each year in recognition of innovation addressing its community's psychiatric needs. The CBHP is the largest community-based psychiatric program in the nation, and serves as a model for similar programs across the country.

“Receiving this award is a great honor for the hospital district. It validates the dedication and commitment of our staff as well as the numerous individuals and groups who partner with us to care for the mentally ill in our community,” said HCHD president and CEO David S. Lopez.

The hospital district created the CBHP in response to an overwhelming need for psychiatric services in the Harris County area and the lack of available resources. Since the program was implemented, wait times to access psychiatric services within HCHD have dropped from more than six months to two weeks.

The program integrates psychiatric health care into community-based primary care centers to foster early intervention and treatment among patients. Through the program, psychiatrists and other behavioral health specialists work side-by-side with primary care doctors to detect and treat psychiatric problems before they worsen or require intervention in an emergency center.

“Roughly one of every four patients we see within the hospital district has a mental health problem. The most common diagnoses are depression, anxiety or alcoholism,” said Dr. Britta Ostermeyer, director of the CBHP and Ben Taub General Hospital's Psychiatric Outpatient Clinic. “Psychiatric problems are so widespread that you need to address the issue at the community-wide level, and this program allows us to do that in an effective and efficient manner. Patients are less hesitant to seek help in their medical home, which is a familiar setting, and having psychiatrists on-site allows patients in crisis to access care immediately.”

Behavioral health specialists conduct individual and group therapy at community health centers and educate at-risk patients on the implications of substance use and abuse. Social workers provide counseling and assist patients with accessing additional resources in the community.

(more)

The CBHP also focuses on education. As part of the program, psychiatrists train primary care doctors to identify symptoms among patients, who are sometimes unaware a problem even exists. They also provide guidance on prescribing medication and the long-term management of psychiatric conditions in a primary care setting.

The CBHP is a result of a collaborative effort between the hospital district, The Menninger Department of Psychiatry and the Department of Family and Community Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine, The University of Texas, the Council on Alcohol and Drugs-Houston and The University of Texas Medical School at Houston.

The Harris County Hospital District is the public health care system for the nation's third most-populous county. It provides more than one million health care visits each year to uninsured and underinsured residents of Harris County. The hospital district operates Ben Taub General Hospital, Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital, Quentin Mease Community Hospital, 12 community health centers, a dental center, eight school-based clinics, 13 homeless shelter clinics and four mobile health units.

###