Investigator Spotlight: An Interview with Robin Randall, MD, MPH



CIAPM-Funded Project: Precision Mental Health to Predict Risk, Prevent, and Treat Depression in Publicly-Funded Youth (UCSF, Lead Principal Investigator: Tony Yang, PhD).

Dr. Randall is Medical Director at Edgewood Center for Children and Families. He joined Edgewood in 1999 as an Associate Medical Director serving youth and their families in both intensive and community-based settings. He is board certified in General Psychiatry and Child and Adolescent Psychiatry by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology.

Dr. Randall received his MD and MPH degrees from Tulane University School of Medicine and Tulane School of Public Health. He completed his Adult and Child and Adolescent Psychiatry training at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF).

1. Why are community partnerships important for health research? What is novel about your partnership with this project?

I have worked at the intersection of academia and community mental health for over 25 years. I know that community partnerships can benefit both the integrity of the research and the community in which the research is done. Community partnerships allow health researchers to connect to real-life problems and look for real-life solutions. If done properly and with respect, community partnerships can also benefit the community in which the research is done. Done well, community partnerships let the community know that the things that impact the community matter and that their needs are being taken seriously. Community partnerships help to maximize the impact that the research can have on the science, as well as the applicability of the research in the lives of everyday people.

Our community partnership is novel in a couple of ways. First, one stated goal of the project is aimed at strengthening our community agency by bringing university knowledge and experience to the agency, the Edgewood Center for Children and Families. The partnership allowed the agency to establish a Community Advisory Board as well as Community Focus Groups guided by the experience and expertise of our UCSF partners. Second, the partnership involves our community agency in multiple aspects of the project in order to ensure that the research and its outcomes are connected to the community. Our UCSF partners have shown a genuine interest in connecting to the community and making sure that the research is responding to the needs of the community.

2. How has your background and experience impacted this CIAPM-funded project? What is lasting impact you hope to make?

I have been connected to UCSF for over 30 years and I have been at Edgewood Center for Children and Families for 26 years. I know what is important in both doing impactful research as well as making a lasting meaningful impact on a community level.

I have three hopes for this project:

I hope that this research has a real impact on how we think about the treatment of adolescent depression and how we bring that treatment to both the adolescents who need it as well as the treatment providers who are charged with their care.

I hope that the establishment of the Edgewood Community Advisory Board and Focus Groups through this project allows our community agency to strengthen our understanding of our community's needs.

I hope that the experience in working with a community partner strengthens UCSF's commitment to community partnerships and community research.

3. Why are the populations you work with often overlooked and important to include in depression research?

The adolescents we work with are often overlooked because they often come from marginalized communities. They are sometimes the most at risk for serious mental illness and significant adverse consequences from that mental illness. They often have multiple factors complicating their depression and multiple barriers to accessing treatment. Treatment approaches that work for others who are not as impacted in our society may not work for them. It is important to include these adolescents in the depression research because treatment that works for them will likely work for others as well and be more robust and flexible in the end.

4. What impacts have you seen, thus far, from the CIAPM-funded project in addressing depression outcomes and advancing health equity?

So far, the most concrete impact I have seen from the project is the successful establishment of the Edgewood Community Advisory Board and the Focus Groups aimed at improving our agency's response to adolescent depression. The Edgewood executive leadership is engaged in trying to understand how the agency can improve our care of adolescents with depression as well as other significant mental health conditions.

In addition, through the partnership with Edgewood, the project has helped connect the UCSF researchers with county-level community mental health clinics serving publicly-funded youth with depression. Through that connection, youth served at county community mental health clinics have the option to benefit from participating in the research being done in the CIAPM-funded project.