

St. John's Episcopal Hospital Integrates Behavioral Health and Primary Care

St. John's Episcopal Hospital, an NQP partner through Catholic Health Services of Long Island, is participating in DSRIP Project 3.a.i (Integration of primary care and behavioral health services), and has recently incorporated a behavioral health specialist, Enny Almonte-Nunez, LCSW, into its primary care practice at 495 Beach 20th Street in Far Rockaway, NY. The practice's primary care physicians are now able to provide patients with a warm handoff to an on-site behavioral health specialist, making behavioral health counseling easier to receive for those patients who could benefit from it the most.

The premise behind Project 3.a.i is to identify behavioral health diagnoses early, allowing rapid treatment, and the ability to ensure treatments for medical and behavioral health conditions are compatible and do not cause adverse effects, as well as de-stigmatizing treatment for behavioral health diagnoses.

"We've incorporated the PHQ-9 into the practice," Ms. Almonte-Nunez said, referring to the PHQ-9 tool that consists of a list of 9 questions used for screening, diagnosing, monitoring and measuring the severity of a patient's depression. "Right now, we are focusing on those patients who, through PHQ-9, are determined to have moderate depression. This allows us to help the patient, and assist them in not reaching a level of severe depression."

"Having a behavioral health specialist on-site helps us provide assistance to patients who are resistant from seeking help because of stigmas associated with mental health," said Natalie S. Schwartz, MD, MMI, FACE, CDE, Chief Population Health Officer, St. John's Episcopal Hospital. "We otherwise would not be able to treat these patients because they will not seek behavioral health counseling on their own."