

Grant Helps St. John's Episcopal Hospital Embed Behavioral Health Professionals at Primary Care Practices

St. John's Episcopal Hospital, an NQP partner, is the recipient of a three-year grant from Thrive NYC that supports embedding new social work graduates into its primary care practices. The initiative helps NQP meet the goals of DSRIP project 3.a.i—Integration of Primary Care and Behavioral Health Services.

The practice of embedding a behavioral health professional into a primary care practice is not foreign to St. John's. Prior to receiving the grant, the hospital embedded behavioral health professionals into its primary care practice at 495 Beach 20th Street in Far Rockaway to support individuals whom physicians identified, using evidenced based screening tools, as being at risk for depression, anxiety, or substance abuse.

"This program has been very successful to date and our physicians are really helping to drive it within the practice," says Terri Coyle, Director of Outpatient Behavioral Health Services, St. John's Episcopal Hospital. "With this additional support we will be able to expand our integrated behavioral health model into the primary care practices on our hospital campus and on Far Rockaway Peninsula. We hope that the program will launch at these practices by the New Year."

Under St. John's model, every patient who walks through the door of their primary care practice will receive a mental health screening that is scored by their physician. Once an at-risk patient is identified, the physician will have the opportunity to provide a warm handoff to the behavioral health professional during the patient's appointment. This way, barriers to patients receiving needed behavioral health services are eliminated, including the stigma associated with making a behavioral health appointment, scheduling conflicts, and travel/transit issues.

The practices will also have access to a consulting psychiatrist who will develop a long-term relationship with the primary care physician and therapist and guide them through some of this new work.

"Our primary care physicians are on the front lines of healthcare, so we need to encourage them to take on behavioral health issues," Coyle explains. "We understand that this is new for them, but we're committed to providing the support they need to be successful."