

New Telepsychiatry Service Improves Timely Access to Psychiatric Evaluations

Every year, more than 25,000 patients come to our emergency rooms suffering from urgent mental health issues. And that's not counting hospitalized patients with mental health conditions due to brain injuries or dementia. Each of these patients needs a psychiatric evaluation to help us develop the best treatment plan. Currently, this often means lengthy waits for an onsite or contracted offsite psychiatrist to fit an evaluation into their busy schedule. The result? Delays in starting critical treatment, longer patient stays and increased costs.

Beginning Oct. 23, to help provide a standardized approach and augment the services of our onsite psychiatric teams, we're launching a new telepsychiatry service that will be implemented in phases in our emergency departments and hospital inpatient units. The new service will be available systemwide by June 2018.

"Our new telepsychiatry service is another one of the many important ways we are looking to improve access to mental health services systemwide," says John Boyd, CEO, Sutter Health Mental Health Services. "It's our mission that every patient at Sutter Health has timely access to mental health services. The new telepsychiatrist service will help make that possible in our emergency departments and hospitals."

Our Mental Health Services team is partnering with Virtual Medical Staff who will provide us with board-certified telepsychiatrists. A special cart equipped with a workstation, high-tech camera, microphone, speakers and Skype for Business will help virtually bring the telepsychiatrist directly to the patient's bedside.

"With the new telepsychiatry service, a psychiatrist will be available to evaluate a patient within an hour of a request—and this service is available 24 hours a day, year-round," says Rick Palmisano, director of Acute Care and Telepsychiatry. "This will dramatically reduce the time a patient has to wait for the appropriate treatment and time spent in the ER or hospital. Most importantly, it's a critical tool to help us improve the quality of care for some of our most vulnerable patients."

Learn more about this new service in the [FAQ](#)

Additional Mental Health Resources

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