

Project Title

Reported Impact of COVID-19 on Chronic Mental Health Condition Management

Author List

CONNIE LEE, Russell G. Buhr, Lauren E. Wisk

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption for those with chronic mental health conditions (CMHC) due to elevated psychological distress and barriers to accessing mental health care. We qualitatively analyzed the reported impacts of the pandemic on management of CMHC.

Of the 1971 respondents to the UC-COVID study, 23.3% identified as living with a CMHC, of whom 78.5% reported any disruption in their access to health care during the pandemic.

Respondents reported decreased provider visits caused pandemic-related closures (“I go to AA regularly... and now cannot go”). Elevated distress frequently caused increased medication usage (“My stress and anxiety have skyrocketed ... for the first time in my life I'm taking a [prescription] sleep aid every single night”) and prevalence of poor health behaviors, like alcohol use.

Respondents often attributed exacerbation of disease symptoms to changes in exercise and diet (“Worsening anxiety, eating more especially high sugar, high carb foods”), limited social interactions (“Severe exacerbation of mood disorder, both directly by social distancing/isolation”), and pandemic related accommodations (“transition to telepractice has made my ADHD more apparent”).

COVID-19 has clear mental health impacts overall but is particularly disruptive for those with CMHCs whose access to care and supports have been interrupted. Providers involved in CMHC management must prioritize mitigation of said impacts during this global health crisis.