

BRIGHT LIGHTS AWARDS



2024

NORFOLK FAMILY HEALTH TEAM

Award: Mental health and addictions

Achievement: Providing Equitable and Timely Access to Brief Counselling Services and Case Management/ Systems Navigation



Norfolk Family Health Team responded when a 2022 Community Needs Assessment showed that 80 per cent of participants identified a need for better access to mental health services. The respondents said inconvenient hours, long waits, the high cost and not knowing how to access resources were the barriers.

The team leapt into action and developed Talk-In, a free service that offers mental health support and help in navigating the system to people without a doctor. Single-session therapy appointments are offered Wednesdays and there is no waitlist. Participants do not require a referral, family doctor nor health card.

Patients requiring additional support are told about external resources and referred to community services. Complex cases are allotted up to three sessions, and all participants are given a written session summary.

In Talk-In's first 12 months, nearly 200 patients of all ages, socio-economic backgrounds, genders and cultures were helped. They presented with many issues including family conflicts, grief, depression, anxiety, domestic violence, involvement in the criminal justice system, financial trouble, food insecurity, trauma and others.

A total of 182 people asked for an appointment and were scheduled within a week. Fifty-five per cent of patients said without Talk-In they would have called their doctor; 35 per cent would have

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gone to the ER; 10 per cent said they would have suffered on their own. They also reported experiencing a sense of emotional relief and empowerment, feeling heard and left their session with renewed hope.

The success of this initiative is an example to healthcare providers that a program such as this can be embedded in the counselling services they already provide. The concept of Talk-In clinic can be disseminated to other providers and serve as a foundation on which to build their own single-session therapy program. Additionally, Talk-In staff are prepared to share lessons learned, both positive and negative, with other teams to help them create a successful program while avoiding the pitfalls and challenges.

Key Facts:

- Talk-In is a free counselling service that has no waiting list;
- Participants do not require referral nor a health card;
- All the patients who completed the feedback form said the single-session therapy was useful.
- 12 per cent of participants were referred for long-term counselling, sessions purchased with Talk-In funds;
- 52 per cent were connected with local community resources.