

TREATMENT OF ADDICTION AND PAIN

Groundbreaking Consultative Service for Addiction and Pain Treatment is Free to Physicians

BY TOM FLANAGAN, MEDIA RELATIONS MANAGER

Even now, years into the opioid crisis, Massachusetts physicians continue to face challenges surrounding the treatment of patients suffering with chronic pain, substance use disorders (SUD), or both.

The complexities of care for patients with these conditions are not confined to the clinical aspect of treatment. The lack of support for health care providers and stigma that mingles among patients and clinicians represent persistent and stiff barriers to receiving or providing evidence-based treatment of pain management and addiction.

An innovative program supported by the Commonwealth that draws on the guidance of colleagues and peers is changing the ways in which physicians care for patients with chronic pain and substance use disorder.

The Massachusetts Consultation Service for Treatment of Addiction and Pain (MCSTAP) is an on-demand, no-cost professional consultation service available to primary care providers and other clinicians on safe prescribing and managing care for people suffering from addiction and chronic pain. MCSTAP is funded by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services, through its contract with the Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership, a Beacon Health Options company.

The Grayken Center for Addiction at Boston Medical Center provides medical leadership of MCSTAP. MCSTAP's physician consultants, who practice in health care systems around the Commonwealth, have extensive clinical and academic expertise in safe prescribing and managing care for patients with chronic pain and/or SUD.



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MD, MPH, FACP

Christopher Shanahan, MD, MPH, FACP, the program's medical director, says the program can bridge the education gap faced by clinicians, who have not had formal training or supervision related to the complex needs of this patient population.

"While some clinicians feel unprepared for treating these patients, it is not unlike care that they provide for patients with other life-threatening conditions, like diabetes or cardiovascular disease," says Dr. Shanahan.

Because most of MCSTAP's physician consultants practice primary care, they "clearly understand the busy context of the primary care setting that callers practice in," says Dr. Shanahan. "They shape consultations around what a caller wants and needs. After reviewing key clinical information with the caller, they guide them as they jointly develop a plan based on the caller's value systems, incorporating evidence-based components of care."

"A MCSTAP consultation always is focused on maximizing benefits of treatment options and minimizing the risks that patients face."

"Our physician consultants are your colleagues who are here to support you on any types of questions you face when caring for these patients as a non-judgmental sounding board, a source of information, or as a coach."

—Christopher Shanahan, MD, MPH, FACP

Importantly, MCSTAP also can address gaps or lapses in care by providing referral information about community-based providers and services that offer a continuum of care and support for patients.

"We treat every clinician and patient as unique and work with the caller to joint-develop a tailored plan that is the most likely to succeed."

The Massachusetts Medical Society ardently supports MCSTAP.

Medical Society President Maryanne C. Bombaugh, MD, MSc, MBA, sees tremendous promise in MCSTAP and noted that it was modeled after Massachusetts Child Psychiatry Access Program for Moms (MCPAP for Moms), which leverages a network of providers and resources that can identify symptoms of postpartum depression and provide pathways for timely and appropriate care.

In an interview with Boston radio station WBUR last summer, Dr. Bombaugh said, "[MCSTAP] may provide that education, that peer-to-peer support consultation, that physicians who have been in practice longer than 10 years can avail themselves of. It has the opportunity to revolutionize the way patients are cared for with substance use disorder in Massachusetts."

"MCSTAP is here to help," says Dr. Shanahan. "Our physician consultants are your colleagues who are here to support you on any types of questions you face when caring for these patients as a non-judgmental sounding board, a source of information, or as a coach."

Massachusetts physicians can reach MCSTAP at 1-833-PAIN-SUD (1-833-724-6783), Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and can learn more at mcstap.com