Brief Overview of the Zufall Model

Since 2011, Johnson & Johnson’s Community Health Care Fund has awarded funding to Zufall Health in order to improve health outcomes of people with serious mental illness (SMI) through primary care – behavioral health integration. In partnership with Saint Clare’s Health System’s BH centers, Zufall has addressed issues affecting the vulnerable, underserved SMI population by providing critical patient navigation services. This BH integration program has brought comprehensive primary medical care and essential supportive assistance to this severely underserved population. Utilizing patient navigation as a tool to facilitate clinical integration between the mental health sector and the patient’s primary care medical home, access of SMI patients to medical and oral healthcare has become significantly less fragmented and episodic with J&J’s continued support. Efforts at internal integration include shared EHR with primary care; inclusion in all clinical and Quality Assurance meetings; a consistent set of agreed upon screenings across all disciplines; collaborative treatment planning for specific patients; some EBPS and some training shared, focused on specific population needs; warm hand offs when possible.

The patient navigator’s consistent presence and persistence has annually helped approximately 400 patients with severe, intractable mental illness who would otherwise ignore their physical health needs because of access barriers to care including lack of transportation, low income, fear, and lack of social support. SMI patients who identify Zufall as their medical and dental home have experienced continued improvements in health outcomes, including reduced incidence and prevalence of obesity, diabetes, HTN, and dyslipidemia. Preventable health conditions are addressed through routine primary care exams, screenings, and care management. Health education is provided on nutrition, smoking cessation, substance abuse, and side effects from atypical antipsychotic medications. Severely underserved patients have been provided with timely access to care as a result of enabling services including translation and transportation assistance; improved continuity of care; enhanced patient-provider communication; monitoring of health status and treatment adherence; linkages of SMI patients to health and human services; health education, support, coaching and follow-up; and provision of a medical home, resulting in improved health outcomes for patients with serious mental illness. Patient Navigator support helps to address issues of non-compliance or impaired treatment adherence.

In 2015, 394 patients were served, of which 116 were new to the program. A total of 2,495 visits were made by SMI patients to Zufall Health’s medical, dental, and behavioral health providers. In 2015-16, J&J rewarded these efforts by committing $125,000 in additional support to expand the primary care/behavioral health integration work by providing collocated services within a behavioral health setting. Zufall encountered many unforeseen challenges in providing accessible on-site medical services within a behavioral health setting in Parsippany, NJ, including preventive care, sick and well visits, women’s health services, and chronic disease management. Ultimately, the behavioral health agency could not consistently produce enough client volume to warrant such allocations of resources. As an alternative,
Zufall began sending its mobile medical unit, the Highlands Health Van (HHV), to Saint Clare’s Hospital on a weekly basis to provide both primary medical care and preventive dental services to the Seriously Mentally Ill patients at both Saint Clare’s Morris Plains and Denville locations. With a capacity limit of ten patients per day, Zufall’s primary care Van services have been in high demand, without the no-shows that are historically part of patient care with the SMI population. Zufall now brings the Van to Saint Clare’s on the same day of each week with the same primary care provider, a scheduling method that augments the consistency that SMI patients need in order to build the essential trust in their service providers. Zufall anticipates that the project proposed here will build upon and coordinate with Zufall’s currently existing efforts.