

# PSYCHOLOGISTS AND PRIMARY CARE PROVIDERS: HOW CAN WE WORK TOGETHER?

## Responding to Physical and Mental Health Issues

As a primary care provider, you are likely to see patients presenting with emotional and psychological conditions and issues, such as adjustment to chronic illness, depression, anxiety, addictions, chronic stress or lack of adherence to medical treatment. Depression in particular increases the risk of heart disease and mortality and is known to damage the immune system. Stress alone is one of the biggest single risk factors for poor health and death, damaging the immune system and increasing susceptibility to disease, reducing the capacity to recover from injury, and increasing mortality.

Many physical health problems can also lead to mental health problems. Patients with certain types of cancer and cancer treatments are more likely to become anxious or depressed. About one 1 of every 6 patients with heart disease will develop major depressive symptoms.

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## Working Together in a Primary Care Setting

### Improving Patient Outcomes

A psychologist, either working with you on-site or on referral, can improve patient outcomes through health behaviour change. Using evidence-based practices, registered psychologists can help your patients learn self-management strategies to deal with their chronic health conditions, and adjust to the emotional impact of health problems and situational stress. By working with patients one-on-one or in a group, a psychologist can provide patients with techniques they need to follow a primary care provider's treatment plan.

### Billing and Reimbursement

Patient billing and provider reimbursement for psychologists working in primary care depends largely on the service delivery model. For example, psychologists may be on staff in a primary care practice where they may receive a salary. Or they may practice independently, seeing patients on referral and managing their own billing system. When working in integrated care settings, Psychologists can generally bill using health and behaviour codes in 15-minute intervals.

### Psychological Interventions: Evidence-Based & Effective

Psychologists provide an array of effective, evidence-based interventions to address mental health concerns and behavioral problems. Psychologists integrate the best available research evidence with clinical expertise to intervene with patients, respecting the patients' values, culture and preferences. In clinical studies of psychological treatments for depression and anxiety, psychological treatments are on par or better than most medications, often with better and longer lasting patient outcomes. When medication is required, a combination of psychotherapy and medication has been shown to have the best patient outcome.

## How Psychologists Can Help

Such problems may require psychological services that your practice may not have the time or resources to provide. By working with psychologists, primary care providers can continue to address both the medical and psychosocial health needs of patients.

## Specialized Education and Training

Psychologists are the largest, specialized, regulated mental and behavioural health profession in Canada and are unique among service providers in mental health in that they work across multiple settings — schools, hospitals, correctional facilities, community offices and clinics, industry. Psychologists have the training and skills required to work in a coordinated manner within a multi-disciplinary team. They offer assessment, consultation, treatment, and program evaluation services and are trained to diagnose and treat mental illnesses and addictions.

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## Psychological Interventions Are Cost Effective

Dozens of research studies have found that effective psychological interventions result in reduced or even avoided costs to the health care system. These “cost offsets” have been found for such conditions as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, cancer and chronic pain.

- Health economists agree that psychology services yield cost-savings. One estimate is that every \$1 spent on psychology services yields \$5 saved in medical costs.
- Psychological interventions are estimated to cost between 10-50% less than pharmacological ones.
- One study found that brief, group psychological intervention for women who had completed medical treatment for Stage 0, 1, or 2 breast cancer, resulted in an improvement in patients’ adjustment and quality of life and a reduction of 23% in health care costs for the two following years.
- A recent Canadian study appearing in the Canadian Family Physician found that assigning primary care patients to psychological treatment resulted in a 49% reduction of visits to family physicians, and significant decreases in total health spending.

## The Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia

APNS is a professional organization established in 1965 to represent psychology in Nova Scotia.

APNS is the only provincial association devoted to representing the needs of psychology professionals in NS.

APNS educates by organizing and facilitating workshops and conferences.

## Ways that Psychologists Can Assist Patients and Family Members

- Provide on-site consultation, assessment and intervention for mental health conditions
- Deliver mental health services to patients referred for a primary care provider
- Help address challenges in patient adherence to treatment plans
- Assess and intervene with patients and families struggling with behavior problems, difficult
- Relationships and other struggles that interfere with overall health and functioning
- Assist patients in better managing their diet, exercises and medication
- Provide the emotional support patients need to be successful in managing their health
- Assist patients in learning strategies for self-monitoring and goal setting
- Use screening tools and primary prevention programs to detect mental health conditions early
- Present educational sessions for both patients and staff on topics such as weight loss or disease management
- Design and use evaluation methods, such as continuous quality improvement measures and patient satisfaction surveys

APNS builds psychological collegiality by fostering a sense of community among all who identify with psychology

APNS advocates for the public through representations to government and employers on matters affecting public mental health and wellness.

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## Statistics

- More than 6.7 million people in Canada (1 million of whom are children and adolescents) are living with a mental health problem or illness today; that is one in five persons, or about 19.8% of Canada’s population in any given year.
- Over the course of a lifetime, more than 4 out of 10 or 43% of people in Canada experience a mental health problem or illness.
- The life and economic impact of major mental illnesses in Canada: 2011 to 2041. Risk Analytica on behalf of the Mental Health Commission of Canada.
- An estimated 20% of Canadian adults have co-occurring mental health and addiction disorders.

Smetanin, P., Stiff, D., Briante, C., Adair, C.E., Ahmad, S. & Khan, M. (2011).

Prevalence and Profile of People with Co-occurring Mental and Substance Use Disorders Within a Comprehensive Mental Health System, Dr. Brian Rush, Senior Scientist at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

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