Types of Mental Health Care

Information for Families

Mental health care services are separated into different levels of care that specialize in treating different concerns. Matching a concern with the appropriate level of care is an important part of treatment. If the level is too high or too low, it could be unhelpful or intensify a concern.

A service's level of care is based on two things:

- Intensity – How often appointments happen, how long they last, where they take place and number of medical professionals involved.
- Restrictiveness – The impact it has on a patient's access to everyday items and activities.

Although it can sometimes be frustrating, repeating or using several different levels of care during treatment can be beneficial. Every organization is unique, but generally levels of care include:

Highest level of care

Inpatient Hospitalization
- Brief admission to a hospital for a new or worsening concern.
- Need for hospitalization is determined by an Emergency Department assessment.
- Services can include mental health therapy, medication management and support from other specialists.

Residential Program
- Patients stay in a treatment facility for up to several months to treat long-term concerns.
- Services can include mental health therapy, medication management and support from other specialists.

Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP)
- Usually involves daily therapy for at least five hours a day, and lasting at least one to two weeks.
- Services can include group counseling, medication management and support from other specialists. Individual and family counseling may also be offered.

Intensive Home-Based Program
- A therapist meets patients weekly or multiple times a week in their home or other community location.
- Therapy usually involves individual and family appointments.

Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP)
- Four to six weeks of two to three therapy sessions per week in the office or through telehealth.
- Services include group counseling and medication management. Individual counseling may also be offered.

Lowest level of care

Outpatient Counseling
- Therapy sessions once a week or every couple of weeks, depending on need and availability.
- Most sessions are in the office or through telehealth, but some organizations offer sessions in community locations.
- Therapy can involve individual, family or group appointments.

Crisis Services, like Mobile Response Teams, Crisis Phone Lines, or emergency departments are available at all levels (except inpatient). Crisis services help work through tough days and identify what level of care may be most helpful. Their services focus on immediate safety.

Mental health medication can be prescribed at any level of care. Talk to your doctor or therapy team if you are interested in medication. They can help you find support and decide if medication is an appropriate part of treatment.

Help is Available 24/7

If you or a loved one is experiencing suicidal thoughts, text or call the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.
In an emergency, call 911 or go to your local emergency room.

If you have a question about care, talk to your child's treatment team.

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