

The Need for a More Defined Role for Psychologists in Adult Consultation Liaison Services in Hospital Settings

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Abstract : In the United States, over 30 million people are hospitalized annually for conditions that require acute, 24-hour, supervised care. The experience of hospitalization can be traumatic, exposing the patient to loss of control, autonomy, and productivity. Furthermore, 40% of patients admitted to hospitals for general medical illness have a comorbid psychiatric diagnosis. Research suggests individuals admitted with psychiatric comorbidities experience poorer health outcomes, higher utilization rates and increased overall cost of care. Empirical work suggests hospital settings that include a consultation liaison (CL) service report reduced length of stay, lower costs per patient, improved medical staff and patient satisfaction and reduced readmission after 180 days. Despite the overall positive impact CL services can have on patient care, it is estimated that only 1% - 2.8% of hospital admits receive these services, and most research has been conducted by the field of psychiatry. Health psychologists could play an important role in increasing access to this valuable service, though the extent to which health psychologists participate in CL settings is not well known. Objective: Outline the preliminary findings from an empirical study to understand how many APPIC internship training programs offer adult consultation liaison rotations within inpatient hospital settings nationally, as well as describe the specific nature of these training experiences. Research Method/Design: Data was exported into Excel from the 2022-2023 APPIC Directory categorized as "health psychology" sites. It initially returned a total of 537 health training programs out 1518 total programs (35% of all APPIC programs). A full review included a quantitative and qualitative comprehensive review of the APPIC program summary, the site website, and program brochures. The quantitative review extracted the number of training positions; amount of stipend; location or state of program, patient, population, and rotation. The qualitative review examined the nature of the training experience. Results: 29 (5%) of all APPIC health psychology internship training programs (2%) respectively of all APPIC training internship programs offering internship CL training were identified. Of the 29 internship training programs, 16 were exclusively within a pediatric setting (55%), 11 were exclusively within an adult setting (38%), and two were a mix of pediatric and adult settings (7%). CL training sites were located to 19 states, offering a total of 153 positions nationally, with Florida containing the largest number of programs (4). Only six programs offered 12-month training opportunities while the rest offered CL as a major (6 month) to minor (3-4 month) rotation. The program's stipend for CL training positions ranged from \$25,000 to \$62,400, with an average of \$32,056. Conclusions: These preliminary findings suggest CL training and services are currently limited. Training opportunities that do exist are mostly limited to minor, short rotations and governed by psychiatry. Health psychologists are well-positioned to better define the role of psychology in consultation liaison services and enhance and formalize existing training protocols. Future research should explore in more detail empirical outcomes of CL services that employ psychology and delineate the contributions of psychology from psychiatry and other disciplines within an inpatient hospital setting.

Keywords : consultation liaison, health psychology, hospital setting, training

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