



COLLEGE OF SCIENCE & ENGINEERING

INSTITUTE OF BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH **Research and News Worth Repeating**

Issue 15, March 22, 2021

Substance Use

Substance abuse among pregnant women on the rise during COVID-19

Verywellhealth – March 17, 2021

A new study out of the Washington State University COVID-19 Infant, Maternal, and Family Health Research Collaborative suggests that pregnant women are among a number of individuals currently struggling with substance use disorder. Crystal Smith, PhD, an assistant research professor at the university in the Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine, found that most pregnant women's substance use dates back to their pre-pregnancy mental state. According to Alta DeRoo, MD, the most common drugs pregnant women receive treatment for include marijuana, alcohol, opioids, and methamphetamine. DeRoo's research suggests that people may be self-medicating for untreated mental illness that predates COVID-19. The effects of such illness are often exacerbated due to the additional stressors of surviving through the pandemic.

<https://www.verywellhealth.com/pregnancy-substance-use-disorders-during-covid-19-5116371>

New bill aims to help fight substance abuse

WAFB9 News – March 16, 2021

The Drug and Specialty Courts Commission has produced a new bill to help lawmakers control the current opioid epidemic in Louisiana. The bill will create funding to expand drug court programs across the state and offer individuals the opportunity to enter long-term drug treatment, agreeing to court supervision rather than receiving a jail sentence. While in the program, participants take drug tests and are offered treatment or rehab. Money for this program will come from settlements and penalties the state recovers in the fight against opioid use. Funding generated by this bill will be used to cover the cost of testing, assessing, and treating program participants. If passed, the bill aims to implement at least one of these drug courts in every parish across the state.

<https://www.wafb.com/2021/03/16/new-bill-aims-help-fight-substance-abuse/>

Overdose fatality review teams: A literature review

Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority – February 19, 2021

States and localities across the United States have implemented overdose fatality review teams to address the impact of the opioid crisis on their communities. Overdose fatality review teams are designed to increase cross-system collaboration (e.g., among various public safety, public health, and social service agencies); identify missed opportunities and system gaps; and develop recommendations for intervention efforts in hopes of preventing future overdose deaths. However, peer-reviewed research on the effectiveness of overdose fatality review teams is limited by the understanding of their usefulness. This article reviews the literature on these overdose fatality review teams (e.g., goals, recommendations, and information sharing protocols) as well as considerations from other fatality review teams.

<https://icjia.illinois.gov/researchhub/articles/overdose-fatality-review-teams-literature-review>

Telehealth

Congress targets telehealth coverage for mental health, substance abuse treatment

mHealthIntelligence – March 15, 2021

Senators have introduced a bill that will require parity in the coverage of mental health and substance use disorder services provided to enrollees through private insurance plans, regardless of whether such services are provided in-person or through telehealth. The S 660 bill is a follow up to the Telehealth Response for E-prescribing Addiction Therapy Services (TREATS) Act introduced last month. However, the TREATS Act failed to make it through Congress and would have eliminated the in-person exam requirement, allowed care providers to prescribe certain controlled substances via telehealth for Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) therapy programs, and expanded Medicare coverage for mHealth services to include audio-only phone calls. The text of this new legislation is not yet available.

<https://mhealthintelligence.com/news/congress-targets-telehealth-coverage-for-mental-health-substance-abuse-treatment>

Amazon is expanding Amazon Care telehealth service nationally for its employees and other companies

CNBC News – March 17, 2021

Beginning this summer, Amazon will expand its virtual health pilot program, Amazon Care, to all of its United States employees. Amazon Care was launched as a pilot program two years ago and provided convenient urgent care visits virtually for the company's employees in Washington state, including free telehealth consults as well as fee-based in-home nurse visits for testing and vaccinations. Amazon will roll out the virtual care part of the program for its employees and other companies nationwide this year. Initially, the additional in-person services will only be made available to employees in Washington state and those near Amazon's new second headquarters in the Washington, D.C., metro area. The company

will also offer virtual health programs as a service for other employees nationally. In the meantime, after acquiring PillPack in 2018, Amazon has developed and launched its own online pharmacy. Last year, the company partnered with employee health provider Crossover Health to launch in-person employee health clinics now serving Amazon workers across 17 sites in Texas, Arizona, Kentucky, California and Michigan.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/17/amazon-is-expanding-amazon-care-telehealth-service-nationally-for-employees.html>

Mental Health

Atlanta schools tackle pandemic's mental health toll on students

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution -- March 22, 2021

As the coronavirus pandemic continues, educators are increasingly focused on the psychological as well as academic toll on students. The Atlanta school board approved a policy emphasizing the impact of childhood trauma on brain development. The policy allows for the implementation of practices and procedures to ensure that students affected by childhood trauma are provided with the necessary interventions and resources to address their trauma, reduce re-traumatization, and improve student academic and emotional growth. It also provides students with several “wraparound” support services including counseling, social work services, health services, psychological services, referral to trauma-informed community agencies, and other social and emotional supports and services that focus on the needs of the whole child.

<https://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta-news/atlanta-schools-tackle-pandemics-mental-health-toll-on-students/VVLNNUMAHNCZVAQG3TZ5FG575A/>

Texas losing \$2.2 billion by not treating mothers' mental health, report says

Austin American-Statesman – March 21, 2021

A new study sponsored by St. David's Foundation and Texans Care for Children found that in Texas, there is a loss of \$2.2 billion over a six-year period due to the untreated mental health needs of mothers. For each mother-child pair with untreated maternal mental health conditions, the average cost grows from \$24,796 during the first year to \$44,460 by the time the child turns five years of age. However, these figures do not include any estimated costs regarding the impact that a mother's mental health may have on nonmaternal caregivers, such as fathers or grandparents, or costs associated with the impact on siblings of these children. Texas' numbers also provided researchers with some insight into the health inequities among different ethnicities. Untreated maternal mental health conditions occurred in 18.2 percent of Black women, 12 percent of Hispanic women and 11.4 percent of non-Hispanic white women. Based on these findings, the Texans Care for Children group is recommending policy changes that address the growing costs of untreated mental health conditions and disparities. These recommendations include:

- extending a woman's access to Medicaid from 60 days after giving birth to 12 months;

- accepting federal funding at a 90 percent match to expand Medicaid;
- fully funding Medicaid, CHIP, Healthy Texas Women and the Family Planning Program and providing the staff needed to enroll eligible women;
- using an existing network to connect pediatricians to psychiatrists for patient telehealth consultations that can be used when doctors are treating mothers with mental health issues;
- expanding access to group-based prenatal care and pediatric care programs in addition to greater access to individual prenatal and well-check medical visits;
- and developing health care and mental health services that include input from women of color in order to meet their needs in a culturally-responsive manner.

Researchers hope that the study will facilitate more conversation and action about women's and children's mental health.

<https://www.statesman.com/story/news/healthcare/2021/03/21/untreated-mental-health-care-moms-costs-texas-2-2-billion/4740751001/>

West Michigan grad student finds racial disparity in WMU mental health access

Research conducted by Western Michigan University graduate student, Kalani Gates, indicates significant disparities in mental health access for West Michiganders. Gates found that Black and Arab American mothers seeking mental health services for adolescents were more than 70 percent less likely to receive a call back from providers compared to their white counterparts. The study consisted of female voice actresses portraying a white, African American, and Arab American mother who sought therapy services for their hypothetical adolescent. A phone script was provided to convey the same message to providers. Associate professor of psychology at Western Michigan University, Amy Damashek, suggests that the disparity could represent an implicit bias against the perceived ethnicity of the callers. Overall, the study found that individuals of color were less likely to be referred for services compared to white individuals.

<https://wwmt.com/news/local/wmu-grad-student-finds-racial-disparity-in-west-michigan-mental-health-access>

COVID-19 Pandemic

The latest on coronavirus pandemic and vaccines

CNN – March 22, 2021

The Biden administration is finalizing its plans for seven million doses of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines to go to Mexico and Canada. President Joe Biden could make the announcement for the final agreement as soon as Friday, March 26. Biden has met virtually with both Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, and Mexican President, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, to discuss the urgent need for more vaccines. The Biden administration has also committed to ensuring enough vaccines for all Americans before sharing doses; and, if this agreement comes together, it would be the first time the United States has shared vaccines directly with another country. Tens of millions of AstraZeneca doses

have been stockpiled in the US but none are presently available to Americans because AstraZeneca has not yet filed for an Emergency Use Authorization with the FDA. Additionally, the vaccine is still going through clinical trials in the US. However, AstraZeneca has already been approved for use in both Canada and Mexico.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/17/politics/us-astrazeneca-mexico-canada/index.html>

None of the known variants have reached the threshold of "variant of high consequence," CDC says

CNN – March 22, 2021

Currently, none of the known variants of coronavirus circulating in the United States have been classified as "variants of high consequence" or near that level, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC classifies coronavirus variants by three levels: variant of interest, variant of concern, or variant of high consequence. All of the known strands in the United States are currently classified as variants of concern. According to the CDC, in order to be considered a "variant of high consequence" the evidence must show that 1) a variant of concern causes more severe disease and hospitalizations, 2) vaccine effectiveness may be reduced against it, or 3) it has significantly reduced susceptibility to therapeutics, among other factors. In a recent White House briefing, CDC director, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, reported that the current variants are still concerning and we should continue to follow COVID-19 measures.

<https://www.cnn.com/world/live-news/coronavirus-pandemic-vaccine-updates-03-22-21/index.html>