



Coordinating Care Of Mind And Body Might Help Medicaid Save Money And Lives

Blake Farmer, Nashville Public Radio August 9, 2019

Modern medicine often views the mind and body on separate tracks, both in terms of treatment and health insurance reimbursement. But patients with psychological disorders can have a hard time managing their physical health.

So some Medicaid programs, which provide health coverage for people with low incomes, have tried to [coordinate patients' physical and mental health care](#).

The goal is to save state and federal governments money while improving the health of patients like John Poynter of Clarksville, Tenn.

Poynter has more health problems than he can recall. "Memory is one of them," he said, with a laugh that punctuates the end of nearly every sentence.

He is recovering from his second hip replacement, related to his dwarfism. Poynter gets around with the help of a walker, which is covered in keychains from places he has been. He also has diabetes and struggles to manage his blood sugar.

But most of his challenges, he said, revolve around one thing: alcoholism.

"I stayed so drunk, I didn't know what health was," Poynter said, with his trademark chuckle.

Nevertheless, he often used Tennessee's health system back when he was drinking heavily. Whether because of a car wreck or a glucose spike, he regularly visited hospital emergency rooms, where every bit of health care is more expensive.

The Case For Coordination Of Mind-Body Care

Tennessee's Medicaid program, known as TennCare, has more than 100,000 patients in circumstances similar to Poynter's. They've had a psychiatric inpatient or stabilization episode, along with an official mental health diagnosis — depression or bipolar disorder, maybe, or, as in Poynter's case, alcohol addiction.

Their mental or behavioral health condition might be manageable with medication and/or counseling, but without that treatment, their psychological condition is holding back their physical health — or vice versa.

“They're high-use patients. They're not necessarily high-need patients,” said Dr. [Roger Kathol](#), a psychiatrist and internist with Cartesian Solutions outside Minneapolis. He consults with hospitals and health plans working to integrate mental and physical care.

As [studies have shown](#), these dual-track patients end up consuming way more care than they would otherwise need.

“So, essentially, they don't get better either behaviorally or medically,” Kathol said, “because their untreated behavioral health illness continues to prevent them from following through on the medical recommendations.”

For example, a patient's high blood pressure will never be controlled if an active addiction keeps them from taking hypertension medication.

Coordinating mental and physical health care presents business challenges because, typically, two different entities pay the bills, even within Medicaid programs. That's why TennCare started offering incentives to reward teamwork.

Paying For Performance

TennCare's interdisciplinary program, known as [Tennessee Health Link](#), was launched in December 2016. The first year, the agency paid nearly \$7 million in bonuses to mental health providers who guide patients in care related to their physical health.

TennCare has a five-star metric to gauge a care coordinator's performance, measuring each patient's inpatient hospital and psychiatric admissions as well as visits to emergency rooms. Providers are eligible for up to 25% of what's calculated as the savings to the Medicaid program.

Studies show this sort of coordination and teamwork could end up saving TennCare hundreds of dollars per year, per patient. And [a 2018 study from consulting firm Milliman](#) found most of the savings are on the medical side — not from trimming mental health treatment.

In experiments around the U.S. among varied patient populations, savings from care coordination at times have been [elusive](#). A TennCare spokesperson said it's too early to

tell whether its program is either improving health or saving money. As a start, though, TennCare reports these dual-track patients are visiting the ER less often.

While there's a strong financial case for coordination, it could also save lives. Studies show patients who have both a chronic physical condition and a mental illness [tend to die young](#).

“They're not dying from behavioral health problems,” noted Mandi Ryan, director of health care innovation at Centerstone, a multistate mental health provider. “They're dying from a lack of preventive care on the medical side. So that's where we really started to focus on how can we look at this whole person.”

But refocusing, she said, has required changing the way physicians practice medicine, and changing what's expected of case managers, turning them into wellness coaches.

“We don't really get taught about hypertension and hyperlipidemia,” said Valerie Klein, a care coordinator who studied psychology in school and is now an integrated care manager at Centerstone's office in Clarksville, Tenn.

“But when we look at the big picture,” Klein said, “we realize that if we're helping them improve their physical health, even if it's just making sure they got to their appointments, then we're helping them improve their emotional health as well.”

Klein now helps keep Poynter on track with his treatment. Her name appears regularly on a wall calendar where he writes down his appointments.

Poynter calls Klein his “backbone.” She helped schedule his recent hip surgery and knows the list of medications he takes better than he does.

Klein acknowledges it's a concept that now seems like an obvious improvement over the way behavioral health patients have been handled in the past.

“I don't know why we didn't ever realize that looking at the whole person made a difference,” she said.

This story is part of a partnership that includes [Nashville Public Radio](#), [NPR](#) and Kaiser Health News.

WPA Announces Exclusive Program for its Members



WPA announced today that it is working with Coverys to provide its members with an exclusive medical malpractice program. AM Best has assigned a financial strength rating of A (“Excellent”) to the Coverys group of companies in recognition of the strong risk-adjusted capitalization, profitable operating performance, and effective enterprise risk management. Coverys has over 40 years of experience protecting the healthcare community with net assets of 3.5 billion dollars and 1.6 billion in policyholder surplus.

This exclusive program through Coverys offers WPA members a broad range of products and services:

- Advanced data analytics that uncover the root causes of risk.
- Robust risk management that provides newsletters, publications and best practice manuals.
- Award-winning education such as webinars, online healthcare risk management and continuing education credits.
- Responsive claims defense with legal counsel who specialize in medical liability cases and utilization of alternative dispute resolution, if appropriate.

Exclusive WPA Membership Benefits:

- **Coverys will provide a 10% discount for being a member of WPA**
- **Additional 5% discount for each WPA member who participates in the risk management eligibility program**
- **Coverys will offer profit sharing to the insured, which will allow sharing of underwriting profits generated from the WPA Exclusive Program**
- **After a period of time and maturity of the program, Coverys will be able to rate the WPA group on claims experience specific to the WPA**
- **Choice of counsel, as long as they have MPL experience**
- **Optional participation in the senior leadership committee to allow for program input by those who benefit from it most**

Coverys is backed by proven financial strength and outstanding support. Founded by healthcare providers, Coverys offers insurance protection and services that help you succeed. You can expect uncompromised defense against medical malpractice claims and proactive risk management and education to help you control loss, reduce the risk of medical error and enhance patient safety.

WPA has local enrollment specialists who are available to address the highlights of the program and answer any questions during the enrollment process.

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Sierra Wellness Calendar

Start the New Year by joining our Tobacco Cessation Program!!!

The Tobacco Cessation Program is designed to provide patients with the motivation, tools and support they need to begin a smoke-free lifestyle and to prevent relapse. Health Plan of Nevada and Sierra Health and Life invites our members to join us by celebrating their accomplishment of choosing a smoke-free lifestyle. The 12 week program may include medication or nicotine replacement therapy.

Health Education and Wellness

9850 Double R Blvd., 2nd Floor, Reno, NV 89521

To refer a patient for a class or consultation, call **775-412-9190**.

Fax referrals to **702-838-1404**.

February 2020

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Diabetes Class 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (Feb. 3 & 10)	Tobacco Cessation Class 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (Enrolled members only)	Pregnancy Class 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (Feb. 5)	Weight Management Support Group 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (Spanish)	Lactation Class 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (Feb. 7)
Weight Management 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. (Feb. 17 & 24)	Lactation Class 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. (Feb. 18)	Pregnancy Class 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. (Feb. 19)	Tobacco Cessation class 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. (Enrolled members only) Weight Management Support Group 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.	

Please Note: Orientation to enroll in TCP is mandatory prior to attending classes.



Actual Member
Portal Shown Here

Western Physicians' Alliance

WPA Exclusive Member Portal: Register Today

Registration Link Below: Access to Education, Savings, Advisors and More.



WPA Member Update - Benefits, Education and Featured Advisors

Dear WPA Physicians and Practice Managers:

Welcome to the new WPA Exclusive Member Portal. We are excited to be able to offer our members a web based Education, Benefit and Advisor panel to help with your practice needs.

There is no charge to access the WPA Portal and you will have access 24/7. Some of the key features included are, Deep Discounts from vendors, Practice Management Solutions and a Complimentary Benefit Review, in which you can learn about the new benefits and cost savings now available to you as a member of WPA.

To help identify how the Portal can benefit your unique practice, you are encouraged to register below. Should you have any questions, please log in to view the instructional walk-through of the WPA member resource center.

And, to help you identify how the portal can benefit your unique practice, you are encouraged to sign up for your Complimentary Benefit Review, in which you can learn about the new benefits and cost savings now available to you as a member of WPA.

WPA Member Benefit and Education Portal: Register Today!

We are pleased to announce the launch of our new and improved Exclusive Member Resource Center. As a member of WPA, you now have **24/7 access** to your online Benefit, Education and Advisor Portal.

[Register now by clicking here!](#)

WPA Exclusive Member Portal: Virtual Tour



The image shows a tablet displaying the WPA Exclusive Member Portal dashboard. The dashboard is titled "Welcome to your Exclusive Member Dashboard" and features several key sections: "education center" with 24/7 Live Presentations and Earn CME Credit Online; "online provider directories" including Provider Directory and Outpatient Services Directory; "meet your advisors" and "Today's Practice PANEL OF EXPERTS" for a personal advisory board; "search and discover your member exclusive benefits" with logos for Office Depot, Bank of America, and others; and "conferences & events" with a complimentary benefit review section. Callouts from external text boxes point to these specific features.

WPA Education Center

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Online Reservation: Complimentary Benefit Review

Discover your new WPA Member Benefits!

Learn what Deep Discounts, Exclusive Services and more that you are already entitled to use in your practice! Our new benefit partners are fully vetted and endorsed to provide you, the WPA member, the best in service and the deepest savings available. From superior Financial Management and Billing Services to a Complimentary Medical Malpractice Premium Cost Comparison, we will discuss your immediate needs, and bring you the best in vendor savings to which you, as a current member, are already entitled.

Register Today

& Schedule your Complimentary Benefit Review through the online portal.