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## **Mental Health Telepsychiatry Program Reaches 20,000 Consultations**

With initial funding from The Duke Endowment, the South Carolina Department of Mental Health (SCDMH) launched its Telepsychiatry Consultation Program in April, 2009. Since its inception, this innovative program has provided more than 20,000 psychiatric consultations in emergency departments across South Carolina.

To meet the critical shortage of psychiatrists in South Carolina's underserved areas, and assist hospital emergency rooms to provide appropriate treatment to persons in a behavioral crisis, SCDMH utilizes real-time, state-of-the-art video-and-voice technology that connects SCDMH psychiatrists to hospital emergency departments throughout the state.

The Program currently provides psychiatrist consultations to emergency departments in 20 hospitals in South Carolina. Independent studies have shown that the Program is meeting its goals of improving patient care and reducing costs. Forty-three percent of individuals who receive Telepsychiatry services are recommended for discharge the day of consult. At the 90 day post-discharge point, consulted patients stay in aftercare at twice the rate of patients who did not receive an assessment. Satisfaction surveys of patients, emergency department medical professionals and participating hospital CEOs are all in the 90% range.

"Several significant challenges are positively addressed through the SCDMH Telepsychiatry Consultation Program," said SCDMH State Director John H. Magill. "It provides quality psychiatric assessments statewide effectively and efficiently at a time when there are large areas with few or no available psychiatrists; squarely addresses the issue of overcrowding in emergency departments and the patients' lack of a personal medical home; is effective in intervening and reducing the 'revolving door' use of emergency departments; it saves an average of \$1,400 per patient episode of care; and finally, it clearly demonstrates the efficacy of the critical use of innovative technology in healthcare delivery."

"The Telepsychiatry Program not only delivers a much needed service to the citizens of our state, it also provides leadership for other South Carolina health care applications of innovative video technology," said Meera Narasimhan, MD, Associate Provost for Health Sciences at the University of South Carolina and Professor and Chair in the Department of Neuropsychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of South Carolina School of Medicine. "Local medical school psychiatry residents are being trained to utilize video technology in assessments, and the Program has fielded inquiries from 14 states interested in establishing their own psychiatric assessment programs using Telemedicine."

The South Carolina Department of Mental Health's mission is to support the recovery of people with mental illnesses, giving priority to adults with serious and persistent mental illness and to children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances. The Agency serves approximately 100,000 citizens with mental illnesses, approximately 30,000 of whom are children and adolescents, and provides outpatient services through a network of seventeen community mental health centers and numerous clinics. It also operates four hospitals, one community nursing care center, and three veterans' nursing homes.

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