Integrating Genetic Counseling Into System of Care to Better Serve Children and Adolescents with Mental Health Challenges

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Abstract

A System of Care (SOC) model includes a spectrum of community-based services and supports for children with or at risk for mental health disorders. It is organized into a coordinated network, builds meaningful partnerships with families, and addresses their cultural and linguistic needs. During the past twenty years, the SOC approach has demonstrated significant improvement in the social and emotional functioning of children. An important challenge in implementing SOC approaches is to develop a skilled workforce through education, technical assistance and coaching, and to expand provider networks and enhance provider accountability. In our residency program, we are developing a model of integrating genetic counseling with SOC in a community-based special education service for children and adolescents mental health challenges, The Lifeline Center for Child Development (Lifeline Center) in New York, where more than 40% of students carry a genetic diagnosis.

Introduction

The concept of a SOC was introduced to the public in the mid-1980s.

The SOC approach has been adopted by child welfare, juvenile justice, education, and substance abuse systems; early childhood programs; systems designed to serve youth and young adults in transition to adulthood; and even many adult-serving systems.

Nationwide research has consistently found that implementing the approach at the system and service delivery levels results in positive outcomes.

To date, the system of care approach can be found in nearly all communities across the nation.

Mental illnesses, in general, are thought to be caused by various types of genetic and environmental factors. Genome-Wide studies have yielded biomarkers of multiple mental illnesses over the past few years.

Applying genetics education in the SOC model has the potential to improve outcomes.

Methods

The SOC model can be used to guide services for children and adolescents with mental health challenges. The SOC model is based on evidence-based practices and principles of community-based care.

The SOC model includes the following elements:

- System of Care Model:
  - School Program (5 to 17 years): 55
  - Preschool (0 to 5 years): 10
  - Total Number: 65

- Teaching Staff:
  - 17

- Therapy Staff:
  - 24

- CAP Residents:
  - 0

- Treatment Teams:
  - 3

- Student Staff:
  - 2.1

- Therapy staff includes occupational, physical, speech, and language, feeding and play therapists, as well as social workers and nurse practitioners.

- CAP residents include two PGY4 residents (full time), two Chief residents (one day per week), and one PGY3 resident (half a day per week).

- Team includes occupational, physical, speech, and language, feeding and play therapists, as well as social workers and nursing staff.

- Components of the education are based on the genetic underpinnings of common mental illnesses such as the dimensions of chromosome abnormalities, gene expression, epigenetic variations, and phenotypes.

- It is hoped that our model of integrating genetic counseling into systems of care can better serve children and adolescents with mental health challenges and their families, and advance knowledge about how to achieve widespread adoption of innovative approaches.

Conclusion

References