

## New Practice Support Program module on child and youth mental health launches across BC

**M**uch anticipated by family doctors across British Columbia, the Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) module from the Practice Support Program (PSP) begins a full rollout in October 2012.

The CYMH module is unique among the PSP modules, as it not only focuses on the clinical care provided by family physicians (FPs) but also addresses the broader multisectoral team of players that provides care for these young patients. FPs who complete the CYMH module training will work in collaboration with child and adolescent psychiatrists, pediatricians, child and youth mental health clinicians, and school counselors in their local communities.

This is the first PSP module that goes beyond the health care system to create a wraparound system of care for children, youth, and their families.

Beginning this fall, module training sessions on child and youth mental health will be offered to FPs throughout the province. Initial funding is available to train 500 FPs, who will learn about enhanced identification and diagnosis of common mental disorders in children and youth, appropriate use of various evidence-based treatments for the most common mental disorders in children and youth, and appropriate application of standardized methods of measurement in the care of mental health disorders in children and youth.

The module is designed to increase an FP's ability to work with children and youth, and the families of those who live with ADHD, anxiety,

and depression. Providing FPs with additional tools and resources that enable them to treat mild to moderate cases of these disorders is expected to create capacity in specialist care settings. Specialist physicians and mental health clinicians will then be able to address more difficult cases, ideally reducing wait times for these services.

The learning module involves three half-day group-learning sessions, offered locally in communities throughout the province. Each group session is followed by an action period of approximately 8 to 12 weeks during which PSP participants try out what they have learned in their own practice, called action periods. During action periods, participants receive in-practice support to ensure they get as much benefit as possible from the learning sessions and have the guidance they need to incorporate newly acquired tools and processes into their practices.

Physicians are compensated for attending the learning sessions and for trying small tests of change in their practice during action periods. Unique to the CYMH module, PSP coordinators across BC are acting as local hubs, bringing together the various professionals in each community who provide care for children and youth with mental health disorders to create care teams. The aim of this endeavor is to enhance mutual understanding of each other's roles and to offer a common language to all.

The pilot period for the CYMH module that began last April was incredibly successful. Participating FPs reported a marked increase in their comfort level for dealing with child and adolescent patients with mild to

moderate mental health conditions. They also reported lots of success working with school counselors, who are often the first to notice issues in high school-age kids. In some communities, FPs even established regular clinics at local high schools in participation with the schools' counseling offices.

The roll out of the CYMH module coincided with the Mental Illness Awareness Week (30 September to 6 October), a national public education campaign designed to help open the eyes of Canadians to the reality of mental illness. The awareness week helped to highlight the pressing need for the kind of skills-improvement training for primary care physicians provided by the PSP and the relevance of the CYMH module.

Dr Stan Kutcher, who specializes in adolescent mental health at Dalhousie University, helped develop the CYMH module to address the need to deliver care in a way that meets the needs of these young patients. A leader in the field of youth mental health, Kutcher points to the CYMH module as revolutionizing the delivery of mental health care for young people, with FPs becoming more competent in identifying and treating most common mental health disorders and providing care directly in their communities.

For more information on the CYMH module, visit [www.pspbc.ca](http://www.pspbc.ca).

For information regarding participation in the CYMH module, contact the PSP coordinator in your health authority. Contact information can be found at [www.gpsc.bc.ca/psp/contact](http://www.gpsc.bc.ca/psp/contact).

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*This article is the opinion of the SSC and has not been peer reviewed by the BCMJ Editorial Board.*