

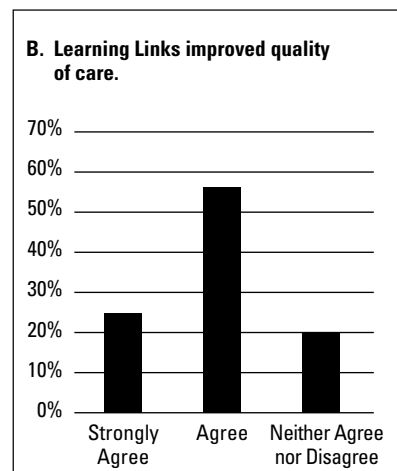
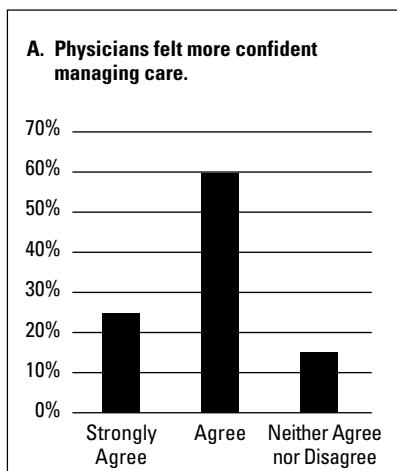
Learning Links: Helping physicians improve child and adolescent mental health care

Children and youth with mental health issues are increasingly being seen by GPs, pediatricians, ER physicians, and general psychiatrists, but many BC physicians feel they lack sufficient training and experience to confidently assess, treat, and manage this burgeoning population.

Learning Links is a new online enhanced learning series of modules to support BC physicians in the delivery of evidence-based assessment, treatment, and consultation services for children and youth with mental health disorders. The series was developed by BC Children's Hospital Mental Health and Substance Use Programs as part of the work of the Child and Youth Mental Health and Substance Use Collaborative, a partnership of Doctors of BC and the BC government, and guided by a physician steering committee led by Dr Jana Davidson, psychiatrist-in-chief at BC Children's Hospital.

The 15 Learning Links modules address a comprehensive range of topics including common diagnoses like ADHD, anxiety and mood disorders, and emergent presentation (self-harm, suicidal ideation). Also covered are less prevalent conditions such as obsessive compulsive disorder, eating disorders, somatization, and tic disorders. Each module takes 30 to 60 minutes to complete online, and each links to a wide range of evidence-based research and resources for more information. The series is eligible for self-directed learning credits for specialists and GPs.

This article is the opinion of the Shared Care Committee and has not been peer reviewed by the BCMJ Editorial Board.



Figure

Panel A shows the extent to which the Learning Links modules improved physicians' confidence in managing children and youth with mental health disorders, and panel B shows the extent to which Learning Links improved the quality of care that physicians provided.

Pilot testers very positive

The modules are getting very good reviews from early users. A pilot test of 12 of the 15 modules was conducted in February 2016 by 28 pediatricians, general psychiatrists, and general practitioners from all regions of BC. The majority of the physicians who tested the modules reported gains in understanding (85%), ability to identify (89%), ability to treat (82%), and confidence in treating (85%) children and youth with mental health disorders.

Value of modules persists

A 6-month follow-up survey of the pilot testers was conducted from August to September to examine the perceived benefit of Learning Links over time. Physicians were asked to rate the extent to which the Learning Links modules improved their confidence in managing children and youth with mental health disorders. In addition, they were asked if Learning

Links improved the quality of care they provided. The **Figure** highlights the very favorable impact of Learning Links after the 6-month period.

Now available to all doctors

The program was initially designed for BC pediatricians and general psychiatrists. However, demand from general practitioners and ER physicians, especially those working in rural and remote communities, is now expanding its reach.

Learning Links is now ready for use by specialist physicians and general practitioners who want to enhance their knowledge and skill in the area of child and youth mental health at their own pace as part of their ongoing professional development. The modules are available at <https://learninglinksbc.ca>.

— Val Tregillus, Project Director, Child and Youth Mental Health and Substance Use Collaborative