

Abstracts of the 2021 Technology, Mind, & Society Conference

Shifting to Telehealth in Community Psychology during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Staff Perceptions

Marcus B. Korcz, LMSW (VA Connecticut Healthcare System)
Maggie M. Manning, Psy.D. (VA Connecticut Healthcare System and Yale University School of Medicine),
Joel D. Wyatt, Ph.D. (VA Connecticut Healthcare System and Yale University School of Medicine),
Ana M. Rodriguez, LMSW (VA Connecticut Healthcare System and Yale University School of Medicine),
Anne S. Klee, Ph.D. (VA Connecticut Healthcare System and Yale University School of Medicine),
Meaghan A. Stacy, Ph.D. (VA Connecticut Healthcare System and Yale University School of Medicine),

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented significant challenges to those who provide and receive community mental healthcare for serious mental illnesses (SMI). Clinicians had to quickly adapt to delivering mental healthcare virtually while also bearing the stress of being essential workers during an unprecedented pandemic. Clients adjusted to telehealth-based modes of care, increased social isolation, and pandemic-related stress. Some have called for the changes made to community mental healthcare to be maintained post-pandemic; however, it is unclear how clinicians have perceived these changes and what needs still exist if these changes are to persist. Community mental health clinicians (N = 23) from two programs at a large VA Medical Center completed surveys and interviews about their experiences and perceptions regarding telehealth implementation during the pandemic. Staff members endorsed successful areas of telehealth engagement (e.g., provider understanding of how to use telehealth modalities, encouraging telehealth use) and reported ongoing needs (e.g., confidence in assisting Veterans troubleshoot issues). Furthermore, a review of open-ended responses yielded themes of 'Knowledge and Training,' 'Attitudes Towards Telehealth,' and 'Technological and Logistical Issues.' These themes offer first-hand insight around potential areas of growth and improvement. Clinicians and Veterans have adapted to telehealth modalities. However, given the rapid implementation of telehealth, advanced training, Veteran skills groups, or communities of practice may serve to solidify existing skills and address existing needs to maintain its use and expand treatment access to those unable to visit community mental health providers in-person.