

Physical health problems bring mental health problems, demand for services

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People who experience a serious physical health event are three times as likely to subsequently see a health care provider for mental health services and medication, according to a new study in *Health Services Research*. In addition, people who view a health event as severe have greater use of mental health services.

“Health care reform, by design, is supposed to improve coordination between different care providers such as the surgeon and psychiatrist,” said lead author Jangho Yoon, Ph.D., MSPH, assistant professor of health policy at Oregon State University. “I view our results as baseline data to determine how to transition to a system that provides coordinated physical and mental care.”

The authors utilized data from the 2004 and 2005 [Medical Expenditure Panel Surveys](#) to identify adults without mental or physical illness in the 2004 survey who went on to experience a negative physical health event in 2005. Compared to those without a physical health problem, people with physical health problems had a threefold increase in the likelihood of obtaining mental health care. This was true even in the absence of what could be considered a catastrophic illness such as cancer or a stroke.

“[The authors] convincingly show the strong relation between experiencing an adverse physical health event and subsequently seeking mental health treatment,” said Tim-Allen Bruckner, Ph.D., assistant professor of public health planning, policy and design at the University of California, Irvine. “Their findings hold important clinical and policy implications, especially in light of the PPACA Health Care Reform Act,” Bruckner said.

“Many clinical settings, including those that serve Medicaid and Medicare patients, lack coordination of care across the physical and mental health domains. This paper indicates that failure to coordinate care may lead to missed opportunities to identify disorders that, if left untreated, worsen other health problems and increase [health care](#) costs.”

The authors note that addressing mental health needs associated with [physical health](#) events may prevent or reduce health complications. They encourage more research to assess positive financial and health implications of physical and [mental health](#) care delivered in tandem.

More information: J. Yoon and S.L. Bernel, (2012). The Role of Adverse Physical Health Events on the Utilization of Mental Health Services, *Health Services Research*, In Press.
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