Addressing the Surging Psychiatric Needs of Youth

“Thank you for everything. I thought I’d lost her.” As program director at McLean’s newly launched adolescent inpatient program in Middleboro, Joyce Velt, LICSW, has had dozens of notes, letters and phone calls from grateful parents expressing similar sentiments. The idea of losing a child strikes fear into the hearts of families everywhere, and the last two years have seen a mental health crisis of epic proportions, particularly among the adolescent population. McLean has stepped to the plate to address these issues.

A Crisis in Child and Adolescent Mental Health
Younger patients have been particularly vulnerable to anxiety, depression and other psychiatric illnesses during the pandemic, especially during remote education. Without a structured school day and face-to-face interactions to help navigate the pressures of adolescence, many are slipping into crisis, according to Velt. “They’re also tapping into their parents’ concerns about the pandemic and the future in general,” she added. “That increases the anxiety levels of kids who are already stressed. Kids who in the past have been able to manage with outpatient care now need hospitalization.”

Wait Times Made Longer by the Pandemic
The backup of psychiatric patients in emergency departments (EDs), long a problem, has worsened as more people are in crisis. In Massachusetts, the bed shortage became so acute that in October 2021, the Massachusetts Hospital Association began tracking the number of psychiatric patients caught in limbo in hospitals across the state. Its weekly report captures how many people were waiting for psychiatric beds every Monday. The numbers ranged from 500 to 650 people statewide at that time, and typically, about one-quarter of those are under the age of 18.

“This is a huge problem,” said Kristen Lancaster, RN, nurse director for McLean SouthEast Adolescent Inpatient Program. “We get daily phone calls from desperate parents asking for help. Their children are either stuck in the emergency department or at home, in crisis, unable to find a placement.”

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Kristen Lancaster, RN
Dear Friends

This first edition of Horizons in 2022 pays tribute to the impact McLean has beyond our core campus in Belmont. Despite the challenges of the past two years, McLean continues to grow, expand access to care and share our expertise broadly.

You’ll read about our new 68-bed inpatient facility in Middleboro, MA, which opened last fall to help meet the surge in mental health needs. Twenty-two of those beds are designated for adolescents — a population whose mental health has been particularly impacted by the pandemic. You’ll also benefit from actor, singer and mental health advocate Selena Gomez, who provided a grant to help McLean launch a series of free educational webinars aimed at youth who haven’t historically had access to mental health education.

This issue also brings an update on McLean’s Program of Assertive Community Treatment (PACT), an initiative that meets clients in the community and strives to support their recovery and independence. New program leadership is working toward ensuring that underserved communities can benefit from our PACT team, too.

Finally, we’re delighted that one of our favorite events is back and better than ever. The 2022 Ride for Mental Health is scheduled for June 25 and 26 in New Paltz, NY. Founder Mac Dorris hopes to top $1M in support for McLean through this year’s event. I hope you will consider joining us.

Happy Spring!

Lori Etringer, Senior Vice President and Chief Development Officer

In 2019, a group of six friends from the Boston area — all women, all mothers — signed up for the third annual Ride for Mental Health. That first year it was all about a ‘women’s weekend’ and getting away from the responsibilities of daily life. They decided to tackle the 25-mile route — some with more trepidation than others.

The experience was transformative. Spectacular weather, extraordinary vistas and an expertly organized event made them eager to do it again. When the pandemic hit, Ride Founder Mac Dorris pivoted, rebranding the 2020 event to “Together…Apart” and launching a club on the popular app Strava. The six friends masked up and did their rides virtually, this time completing 50 miles and raising funds as part of Team McLean.

“It started as a lark. I didn’t even have a decent bike. But I wanted to challenge myself and support my friend who works at McLean,” explained Christine. “This will be our fourth year participating and now it’s personal for me. A loved one had a crisis and needed emergency psychiatric care last year. It was terrifying and hit home how critical it is to have access to good treatment. I have a renewed enthusiasm and appreciation for this event now.”

Monitoring the pandemic carefully, Dorris brought back a hybrid version of the Ride in 2021, inviting cyclists to join him in person in New Paltz, NY. Some opted to stick with the virtual effort, but the group of friends were determined to make a weekend of it. And, like Christine, the others were finding their own personal answers to “why we ride.” In the months between Rides there were intense conversations about the prevalence of mental illness and an increasing awareness that each one of them had a story to tell and a motivation to keep on riding.

“The pandemic has had such an impact on mental health. I see that in my own family. I see it in my kids, my nieces and nephews and my friends — so many people are struggling and it’s hard to find help right now,” said Liane, another one of the group. “There’s not much I can do on my own, but by joining the Ride, I’m part of the solution. I’m raising much-needed funds that will have an impact on real people. And training to ride 50 miles on those hills is good for my own mental health!”

The Ride was established in 2017 by Dorris in memory of his late son Eric who struggled with mental illness. A passionate cyclist, Dorris hoped he could channel his grief into the event while raising funds for McLean. Now in its sixth year, The Ride has blossomed into a much-anticipated annual event for hundreds of cyclists of every skill level.

“This event has turned into a wonderful, healing experience for so many. From the beginning, we’ve used the term ‘ride away the stigma’ and I’ve loved watching relationships build over candid conversations about mental illness,” said Dorris.

“I ride to restore hope knowing that McLean will use these funds to find more ways to help those who are suffering.”

Beth, Ride Participant
To date, the Ride has raised more than $800,000 for McLean, and these funds fuel a range of initiatives across the hospital, including access to clinical care for young people, scholarships for patients and families struggling to pay for treatment, opportunities for young researchers to pursue new ideas and support for critical capital needs on campus. Most recently, Dorris opted to direct some of the Ride’s proceeds to support a summer research internship program aimed at increasing opportunities for college students of color to pursue careers in neuroscience.

The 2022 Ride, scheduled for June 25 and 26, is gearing up to hit some impressive milestones. Dorris is determined to crest the $1M mark in support for McLean and wants to register 600 or more cyclists.

As soon as registration opened, all six women signed up again — and they’ve welcomed a seventh into the fold. It’s a tradition now. They’re itching to get out on their bikes and are looking forward to heading to New Paltz in June. In the meantime, they’ll be talking openly about mental illness, supporting each other and raising funds to support McLean.

“This year feels especially critical,” said Beth. “Never before have I seen so many people in my life struggle with anxiety and depression. Navigating the loneliness and isolation of the pandemic has been extraordinarily hard. I ride to restore hope knowing that McLean will use these funds to find more ways to help those who are suffering.”

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Ride Founder Mac Dorris

Learn more about the Ride at rideformentalhealth.org
Visit https://www.bikereg.com/the-ride-for-mental-health to register to Ride and join Team McLean
Can’t ride? Consider supporting Team McLean at https://www.pledgereg.com/4080/Team/18130
Interested in volunteering? Email Sandra at samueller@partners.org
Contact Sally at sspiers1@partners.org for more information
Mark Longsjo, LICSW, knows firsthand how the psychological distress caused by the pandemic is playing out in hospital EDs across the state and country.

Longsjo, senior director of McLean SouthEast, a McLean satellite located in Middleboro, Mass., also works part-time in an emergency department doing psychiatric evaluations. “Sometimes people are waiting in hallways. The staff is stressed. The system is stressed. Some days have seemed insurmountable.”

McLean has responded by adding a second location to McLean SouthEast. The new 68-bed facility, called MSE at Oak Street, offers 22 inpatient beds for adults with depression and anxiety, 24 beds for adults with psychotic disorders, and 22 beds for young people ages 13 through 18. “We effectively opened up a new hospital, and it’s been wonderful to be able to respond to the need so quickly,” said Longsjo. This herculean effort has not gone unnoticed or unappreciated. Families are grateful for the treatment and hope that this new program is providing. “Thank you for everything, this is best place we’ve been,” wrote one parent whose child had been hospitalized elsewhere six times. “It is amazing how you’ve worked with my daughter, I thought I’d lost her forever,” wrote another.

Philanthropic support helped the facility quickly move from dream to reality. “Our Trustees understand the critical shortage of resources for youth in psychiatric crisis and are deeply concerned by the dramatic exacerbation of mental health issues currently facing children and adolescents,” said Maureen H. Bleday, CEO of the Yawkey Foundation. “We feel privileged to play a part in supporting the adolescent inpatient program at McLean SouthEast, especially since the much-needed care, hope and healing provided there closely aligns with Tom and Jean Yawkey’s lifetime commitment to supporting youth with emotional and behavioral health issues.”

A second foundation, which requested anonymity, provided a grant to assist with start-up costs related to hiring and training members of the new clinical teams.

**Serving Southeastern Massachusetts and Beyond**

McLean has had a presence in Southeastern Massachusetts for more than two decades, mostly serving residents of that part of the state as well as those living on Cape Cod and the Islands. The new Oak Street building is just half a mile from McLean SouthEast’s Isaac Street facility. Both sites now care for local patients as well as those from further afield. “We have patients from Boston, MetroWest and the north shore,” said Longsjo. “We’re here for all patients.”

While beds in psychiatric settings aren’t always designated for patients with certain illnesses, hospital leadership wanted to reserve the new adult beds for patients with some specific diagnoses, according to Longsjo. This approach acknowledges that, for example, patients with mood disorders like anxiety and depression may do better with a more specialized approach involving milieu, individual, and group therapy. (Milieu therapy involves building a supportive, structured community among patients where they can practice their interpersonal and coping skills.) “We wanted to make sure our care is as person-centered as possible,” said Longsjo.

**A Continuum of Care for Adolescents**

Between the two sites, adolescents can now access a range of care. The 22 new inpatient beds at MSE at Oak Street join the same number of adolescent “residential” beds at the Isaac Street facility as well as its partial hospital program. Residential beds are for patients who are less ill than those who require inpatient beds. And partial hospital programs offer full-day treatment, but patients go home in the evening.

“McLean SouthEast now offers an amazing continuity of care for our young patients,” explained Lancaster. “A patient can start on the inpatient unit, then step down to the residential program, then move to the partial hospital program, then home — or the opposite journey can happen. The new space is wonderful and we’re so grateful for the philanthropic support that made it happen.”

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Maureen H. Bleday, Yawkey Foundation CEO
Singer, actress, producer and founder of Rare Beauty, Selena Gomez uses her celebrity status and expansive platform to bring awareness to mental health. Now, her Rare Impact Fund has donated $100,000 to McLean to fund a series of free educational webinars targeting young people as well as the people who care about them — parents, teachers, coaches and others. The Rare Impact Fund is an outgrowth of Rare Beauty, Gomez’s makeup line that channels one percent of its profits to the fund.

“I’ve had the honor of meeting many McLean clinicians and have seen up close the incredible work that goes on there,” said Gomez. “When it was time for our first round of grants to be distributed, I knew McLean needed to be recognized for its commitment to expanding the free mental health webinar series aimed at teens and young people.”

Elyse Cohen, vice president of social impact and inclusion for Rare Beauty and president of the Rare Impact Fund added “McLean’s programs are always evidence-based and that’s very important to us. We liked the opportunity to scale an educational campaign to audiences throughout the U.S. and beyond and believe that webinars are a format that can reach a lot of people.”

If the past is prologue to the future, Rare Impact-funded webinars will have a large viewership. McLean launched its educational webinar series in 2020, during the height of the pandemic, and it currently reaches about 1,000 viewers a week in 100 countries. The new installment seeks to reach an even broader audience, especially targeting underserved areas in the United States, South America, and certain Asian countries, including India and Pakistan.

“Selena and the Rare Impact Fund understand that improving mental health literacy reduces stigma and helps people make good health decisions and take better care of their own mental health,” said McLean President and Psychiatrist in Chief Scott Rauch, MD. “We are very grateful for this gift, which will enable us to educate many more young people and others here in the U.S. and abroad.”

The Webinars
Each biweekly, one-hour webinar will start with a short explanation of the topic by a McLean expert, followed by questions from the audience. The sessions are live and videotaped for on-demand viewing later. Subtitles are available in Spanish, and in Hindi and Mandarin for certain episodes.

Webinar topics will be wide-ranging and attuned to culturally sensitive issues, such as the impact of mental health stigma in various cultures. McLean experts with diverse backgrounds are being tapped as presenters. Past webinar titles have included: Social Media and the Mind; My Story of OCD — as a Patient and Provider; The Silent Battle: Men, Body Image, and Mental Health; and Ask Me Anything about Marijuana, CBD, and Mental Health.

Cohen said the Rare Impact Fund is confident in McLean’s ability to choose the most relevant topics for the new webinars, but suicide and dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) are two they hope receive some airtime. “Suicide is the second leading cause of death in the Gen Z population — who are roughly between 10 and 25. Also, Selena is a huge proponent of dialectical behavioral therapy, which is a very effective treatment for several disorders, but not as accessible as it should be,” said Cohen. “Selena’s dream is that more people can access the fundamental elements of DBT treatment.” DBT teaches people how to cope with stress, regulate emotions, and improve interpersonal relationships.

Gomez and the Rare Impact Fund
Gomez is no stranger to McLean. In 2019, she received the McLean Award, presented to one person a year who furthers the public’s understanding of psychiatric illness and mental health. And in 2020, she spoke publicly about being diagnosed with bipolar disorder and treated at McLean.

The Rare Impact Fund aims to raise $100 million in the next decade to help address gaps in mental health treatment, particularly for underserved communities. “Our hope is that McLean’s webinar series helps equip young people and those who support them with tools and resources, reduces stigma, and increases the conversations around mental health,” said Cohen.
McLean’s Program of Assertive Community Treatment (PACT) strives to provide customized, person-centered care in the community. Serving people that primarily have chronic mental illnesses like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, the program’s goal is to help clients live fulfilling, independent lives, keeping them at home and out of the hospital. “We walk alongside them, recognizing the potential and power within them,” said PACT Medical Director Rahel Bosson, MD. “We help stabilize them clinically so they can transform their lives in ways that are meaningful to them.”

Now, in its fourth year, McLean’s PACT is striving to care for more people from underserved communities who have traditionally not looked to McLean as a treatment option. And philanthropy is helping make this a reality.

The PACT approach is hands-on and practical, helping clients apply coping skills they have learned in therapy to their everyday lives. Much of the team’s work takes place in the community. For instance, PACT may assist people with activities like managing medications, job hunting, running errands, accessing government benefits, navigating the court system, and handling crises. The team is focused on the goals of the individual, including the client in all aspects of decision-making by using concepts of Open Dialogue and Dialogic Consults which create opportunities for equity in conversation and does not characterize the clinician as an ‘expert’ who holds the answers.

One current client is recovering from a manic episode and having trouble keeping organized, said Bosson. “We’re helping her with cooking, grocery shopping, cleaning and organizing so she can feel more comfortable in her living space. We also teach people to recognize the early warning signs of decompensation — when their mental health begins to deteriorate — so they can alert the team and we can provide appropriate support.”

The PACT team is available 24/7.

Health Equity to the Forefront

In the past year, PACT has prioritized serving more communities of color, so Bosson has been forging relationships with community health centers, faith organizations, and other institutions that are integrated in people’s lives. “We need to build bridges between McLean and these communities,” she explained. “We believe the best way to do that is to create partnerships with organizations where trust has already been established.”

This new emphasis on reaching underserved clients will not be a one-and-done effort, according to Bosson, but rather the early stages of a transformation that is occurring hospital-wide. “I want to graft our PACT team into the community so people see McLean as a place where they can receive effective care.”

PACT also plans to expand and diversify its staff to better reflect the populations it serves and step-up cultural competency training for program staff and the broader clinical staff within the division of psychotic disorders.

“Being an immigrant myself, I appreciate the significant role that culture, beliefs, and background play in healthcare, how you interpret your illness and how you recover,” said Bosson, who was born in Ethiopia and spent her formative years there and in Sweden and Belgium. “We want to provide care that is informed by cultural context and upbringing. Often, we expect our clients to adapt themselves to what we need, but instead, we should be adapting to the needs of our clients.”

The Critical Role of Philanthropy

McLean’s PACT program was started via philanthropy, and donor support has been critical to its growth and evolution. National Council member Monica Luke, who was instrumental in creating a PACT team at McLean in 2017, has generously supported the program through the Living Assistance Fund. Former McLean Trustee Ron Jackson supports PACT because he is impressed with the program’s goals. “PACT enables people with serious mental illnesses to stay out of the hospital and live more fulfilling lives,” he said.

Sixteen people are enrolled full-time in PACT and seven, who are able to be more independent, are served in the step-down program. “If something is going on with them between meetings, we expect them to initiate contact,” said
Program Director Kelly Scanlon, LICSW. Clients typically spend between three and 12 months in PACT. In addition to Bosson and Scanlon, PACT’s treatment team comprises three licensed social workers, a nurse practitioner, and a certified peer specialist with expertise in job counseling.

Client-centered with Family Involvement

PACT’s client-centered approach means that the staff is always trying to assess what’s important to clients, so they can rebuild their lives based on things that are meaningful to them. The team also does family coaching, helping relatives transition out of the central role they’ve played in their loved one’s lives. “Families need help figuring out how best to support their family member toward independence,” explained Scanlon. “We have weekly calls with families and rely heavily on them for feedback on how things are going.”

Studies of the PACT model have shown that the multidisciplinary, wrap-around supports and ability to intervene quickly when illnesses exacerbate help keep clients out of the hospital or shorten lengths of stay and reduce homelessness and incarceration.

PACT is still in the early stages of its expansion, but it has already received several referrals from communities it hasn’t served in the past. “Philanthropy is so important to making this vision possible and we’re incredibly grateful for the insight of the donors who support our program,” said Bosson.

To support PACT at McLean, contact Keith at kraho@partners.org or designate PACT when you make a gift online at giving.mcLean.org.
David is a donor, a former patient at McLean’s OCDI program and a member of McLean’s Patient and Family Advisory Council (PFAC). In his role at PFAC, David is dedicated to reducing the stigma associated with a psychiatric diagnosis. He has graciously shared an aspect of his own story below:

“Throughout my career, I kept it secret that I had a fear of the number ‘13’ and avoided it at all costs. Eventually, my obsessive ruminating began to affect my ability to work. I was ashamed, and the self-inflicted stigma was paralyzing. I was scared to lose my job and my mind.

In December 2018, I flew from Florida to Belmont, MA, to be a patient at the Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder Institute (OCDI) at McLean Hospital. During the first few weeks of treatment, I noticed patients were taking ‘timed’ showers and held self-compassion books close to their hearts. Initially I was disdainful and I could not believe someone needed to be timed while taking a shower! I unfairly stigmatized these other patients as ‘weak.’ Then, I was being timed in the shower! I realized how hypocritically judgmental I had been.

Over time, and through my treatment at the OCDI, I realized that I had strayed from my values of helping others, spending time with family, and even reading that self-compassion book.

I was healthier and a much kinder person by the time I was discharged.

As I am writing this, I hoped to define stigma, reflecting on my own experiences. Stigma is what keeps us from living value-based lives, the lives we want to live.”

What Is Stigma?

If you would like to share your story to help reduce the stigma of a psychiatric diagnosis, please contact Ben at bogilvy@partners.org.

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