

Managed Healthcare

Patient screening: "Like ordering a lab test"

Physicians rarely use depression screening tests. Why? Because they find them time consuming and inconvenient. But a new psychiatric screening test, the Shedler QPD Panel, has been in use in busy Kaiser Permanente clinics for over a year, and the physicians love it. The test is helping Kaiser Permanente provide better patient care and also control costs.

Dr. Jonathan Shedler, a psychologist, designed the test after conducting interviews and focus groups to find out why physicians didn't use existing tests. They told him they wanted a test that 1) required no time from them, 2) required no time from their staff, 3) required no training, 4) diagnosed the full range of mental disorders they were likely to see (not just depression), 5) made specific diagnoses using DSM-IV diagnostic criteria, 6) presented results in a familiar format and 7) was liked and accepted by patients. One physician summed it up: "We'd like to order a lab test."

The QPD Panel is self-administered by patients in about six minutes, usually in the waiting room. It screens for nine common psychiatric disorders using current DSM-IV diagnostic criteria: major depression, dysthymic disorder, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, bulimia, alcohol and substance abuse, and somatization disorder. It also screens for suicide risk. The test results are available immediately, and physicians get a computer-generated "lab report" that resembles a familiar blood chemistries report. The QPD Panel has higher validity than other psychiatric screening tools.

The QPD Panel is administered on portable, hand-held computer units about the size of a book (they resemble an Etch A Sketch). Patients respond to true-false

questions on a video screen. Internal logic allows the test to probe in greater or lesser detail, depending on responses to earlier questions, so healthy patients are not asked irrelevant questions, and patients with disorders are examined in-depth. The questions require only a grade school reading level.

The "lab report" is printed as soon as the test unit is placed on a small docking station and provides numerical scores that measure the severity of a patient's symptoms. With out-of-range scores that signal clinically significant disturbance, a note indicates whether the patient meets DSM-IV criteria for a psychiatric diagnosis, and the physician gets a list of the symptoms that led to the diagnosis.

In Kaiser Permanente primary care clinics, patients complete the QPD Panel in the waiting room, and the lab report is in their charts before they get to the exam room. Doctors make comments like "This test helps me give my patients better care" and "This actually saves time." Patients say it is non-threatening and easy to use.

Dr. Arne Beck, research and development director for Kaiser Permanente, Rocky Mountain Division, spearheaded the program to put the QPD Panel in primary care clinics. "The QPD Panel allows our physicians to quickly and accurately diagnose psychiatric disorders and make better treatment decisions," says Beck. "There is no question it is improving the quality of care."

Beck also thinks the QPD Panel will help control costs: "When depressed patients are diagnosed by the QPD Panel and get appropriate treatment, unnecessary use of other health care services declines," he says.

For more information contact Digital Diagnostics at (800) 559-9885 or send e-mail to info@digitaldiagnostics.com. *mcp*

"This is improving the quality of care."