

GazetteXtra

HealthNet to host Sept. 19 conference on mental health

By Shelly Birkelo, *Janesville Gazette*

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What: HealthNet of Rock County Southern Wisconsin Conference on Mental Health

When: 8 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Monday, Sept. 19.

Where: Pontiac Convention Center, 2809 N. Pontiac Drive, Janesville.

Registration: \$100 for the general public, \$150 for those claiming continuing education credits at healthnet-rock.org or by calling 608-314-1923.

JANESVILLE—Rock County has a shortage of mental health providers, even though psychiatric conditions are a leading cause of hospitalization in the county, according to state and federal officials.

“Rock County has some of the highest rates of depression, suicide and overdose death but has the lowest rates of mental health access,” Ian Hedges, HealthNet executive director, said in a news release.

HealthNet hopes a September conference it is organizing will help.

Rock County has been designated by the state and federal governments as as a mental health provider shortage area, Hedges said. The 2014 Rock County Health Needs Assessment found that psychiatric conditions were the county's leading cause of hospitalizations other than childbirth.

HealthNet will host the Southern Wisconsin Conference on Mental Health, offering education and resources to health care providers and caregivers. It is scheduled for Monday, Sept. 19, at the Pontiac Convention Center, 2809 N. Pontiac Drive.

“As we are seeing these problems persist in our patients, we want to bring together the community to provide awareness of these problems and find solutions,” he said.

HealthNet is a nonprofit, free, medical, dental and vision clinic that provides health care services to low-income and uninsured Rock County residents. It has expanded its mental health services after being awarded a state grant for equipment and software to launch a telepsychiatry pilot project.

HealthNet also was awarded a grant by the Women's Fund of the Community Foundation of Southern Wisconsin to integrate behavioral health care through its primary care nurses and doctors at its medical clinic, 23 W. Milwaukee St., Hedges said

Featured speakers at the conference will include:

-- Patrick Kennedy, author and former Congressman.

-- Dr. Patrice Harris, chairwoman of the American Medical Association Board of Trustees.

-- Rep. Tim Murphy, R-Pa., who recently championed mental health reform legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives.

-- Dr. Ranna Parekh, director of diversity and health equity for the American Psychiatric Association.

-- Dr. Jerry Halverson, immediate past president of the Wisconsin Medical Society.

-- Dr. Paul Pendler, assistant professor of clinical psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

-- Shel Gross, director of policy for Mental Health America-Wisconsin.

-- Dr. Bruce Christiansen, senior researcher at the Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention for the University of Wisconsin.

Conference topics will focus on cultural competency in mental health practice, overcoming the opioid epidemic, mental health reform, mental health parity, suicide prevention, integrated care in clinical practice, tobacco cessation for patients with mental illness and workplace mental health issues.

Three conference tracks will be offered and include workshops for health care providers, mental health system stakeholders and caregivers.

Mental health issues are not just a problem in Rock County, Hedges said.

"This conference can be beneficial to other municipalities in southern Wisconsin," he said.