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Why Coordinated Behavioral Care wants to be a testing ground for tech companies

As the health care industry continues its shift toward value-based care, Manhattan-based Coordinated Behavioral Care is keenly aware of the impact that emerging technologies stand to have in addressing the needs and challenges of patients and providers.

Because of the large number of emerging technologies focused on health, the nonprofit has decided it wants to serve as a central resource for its network providers to explore, vet and pilot them, ultimately helping to support and scale the ones it deems best in class. In a newly issued white paper, it has outlined its goal in doing so: to continue to drive down the cost of care and improve patient engagement and outcomes, and to develop a framework for partnering with payers and providers to implement innovative tech solutions.

"We realized that this is a huge issue and that the providers were drowning in cold calls from [technology] providers," said Dr. Jorge Petit, president and CEO of Coordinated Behavioral Care. "As an independent practice association, part of the role is to help the network understand what's out there."

The Coordinated Behavioral Care Innovations Hub will focus on tech companies aiming to address mobile-based care and telepsychiatry, patient engagement, medication adherence and community-based referrals. The nonprofit already has partnered with a number of companies, such as Healthify, Wellth and Karuna Health, according to its white paper. The companies, backed by venture capital firms, are focused on locating community services, giving patients incentives to better manage their own health, and engaging patients, respectively.

"A lot of technology companies that focus on behavioral health problems, they're technologists and don't understand the nuances and complexities of dealing with the behavioral health population that is Medicaid eligible," said Matt Loper, co-founder and CEO of Wellth.

What is valuable about the innovations hub is the experience that the Coordinated Behavioral Care team has in working with those patients and their unique challenges, he said.

"We got to know Coordinated Behavioral Care as a very early stage digital health startup," said Joe Kahn, co-founder and CEO of San Francisco-based Karuna. In about six months, "we got an incredible level of feedback from them."

Karuna has developed a communication platform designed to help care-management teams increase patient engagement and reach rates. The platform enables teams to join patient and family conversations via SMS, WhatsApp, phone calls, and other channels in a HIPAA-compliant way.

The team at Coordinated Behavioral Care advised Karuna to build a technology solution that works when members of care-management teams are in the community—in patients' homes, homeless shelters, food pantries, etc.—rather than just in the office on a telephone, Kahn said.

For Coordinated Behavioral Care, it will be important to demonstrate that technologies it pursues can affect patient outcomes, Petit said. The innovations hub will have to gather data and determine how a certain technology can benefit a rate structure and how it can be paid for.

Coordinated Behavioral Care said in its white paper that it will be able to pursue payer and startup partnerships to fund innovation and implementation activities. It also can look to financial opportunities for technology interventions eligible for Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement, including telehealth, remote patient monitoring and health coaching.

—Jennifer Henderson