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Community-Centered mental health solutions: A replicable navigator and mobile unit model for structurally disadvantaged regions

Abstract:

Globally, rural and structurally disadvantaged communities face persistent barriers to accessing timely, equitable, and culturally responsive mental health care. Geographic isolation, stigma, provider shortages, and socioeconomic disparities contribute to service gaps that remain unaddressed by conventional healthcare models. In response, Castaner General Hospital in Puerto Rico implemented a two-pronged initiative integrating Community Behavioral Health Navigators and a Mobile Mental Health Unit to deliver accessible and sustainable psychological care. The program trains trusted community members and peer leaders to serve as behavioral health navigators, equipping them to identify early signs of distress, offer psychoeducation, reduce stigma, and facilitate linkage to clinical services. Operating in tandem, the mobile unit provides on-site psychological evaluations, brief interventions, crisis support, and coordinated referrals to higher levels of care, directly within rural communities. Preliminary outcomes from Puerto Rico indicate improved service access, community engagement, treatment adherence, and a measurable reduction in mental health stigma. This initiative offers a cost-effective, adaptable model grounded in principles of community empowerment, social justice, and interdisciplinary collaboration. This presentation will outline the conceptual framework, training and implementation strategy, and early impact of the program. It will also explore its relevance and adaptability across global settings facing similar systemic challenges in mental health care delivery. By centering community voices and bridging clinical gaps, this model provides a replicable blueprint for achieving mental health equity in underserved populations—advancing the field through innovation and inclusive practice.

Biography

Ivannys Alexka Cappas Perez, is a clinical psychologist at Castaner General Hospital in Puerto Rico, where she leads the psychological services of the Mobile Mental Health Unit. Her work focuses on equity, innovation, and strengthening psychological care in rural communities, integrating local leadership with clinical practice to expand access to services in remote areas. In 2024, she was awarded the First Accessit in the Professional Care-giver category at the 10th edition of the supercuidadores Awards, presided over by Their Majesties the King and Queen of Spain.