

**Integrating Primary Care and Mental Health**  
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The 2001 U. S. Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health was a landmark publication. It reinforced the fundamental concept that mental health is fundamental to overall health. Specifically, Americans assign high priority to preventing disease and promoting personal well-being and public health. However, they are often unaware of the choices they have for effective mental health treatments. As such, public and private agencies have an obligation to facilitate entry into mental health care and treatment through the multiple "portals of entry" that exist: primary health care, schools, and the child welfare system. (see <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/mentalhealth/summary.html#topper>)

The 2003 President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health echoed the importance of these portals of entry, especially that of primary care. Researchers noted that primary care providers prescribe the majority of psychotropic drugs for both children and adults. "While primary care providers appear positioned to play a fundamental role in addressing mental health, there are persistent problems in the areas of identification, treatment, and referral of disorders. For example, of individuals who die by suicide, approximately 90% had a mental disorder, and 40% of these individuals had visited their primary care doctor within the month before their suicide. During visits in the primary care setting, the question of suicide was seldom raised." (see <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov/reports/FinalReport/downloads/FinalReport.pdf>)

The report acknowledged that in a transformed mental health system "effective mental health treatments will be more readily available for most common mental disorders and will be better used in primary care settings. Quality screening and early intervention should occur in readily accessible, low-stigma settings, such as primary health care facilities." AMHCA's Public Awareness, Advocacy, and Marketing committee is interested in exploring how mental health counselors can play a more salient or "liaison" role in working with primary care providers. Important areas include (a) improved communication and marketing between professionals, (b) enhanced mental health screening in primary care, (c) collaboration regarding psychotropic medication referral and management, and (d) early intervention in primary care.

Your ideas are critical to the health of millions of Americans. Please submit your suggestions on how to further integrating primary care and mental health and to [jking0964@msn.com](mailto:jking0964@msn.com) or call 801-404-8733.