Catching up to the Crisis: Opportunities for Pediatric Hospitals to Improve Children's Access to Mental Health Services

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Because of longstanding shortages of pediatric mental health clinicians and inpatient psychiatric hospital beds, many children have unmet mental health needs. Some of these children seek safety-net care in children's hospitals and emergency departments (EDs) for mental health crises, such as suicidal thoughts or aggressive behaviors. Although acute-care medical hospitals may not have been designed for mental health crisis care, acute-care hospital teams are developing experience in mental health crisis management. As a result, ED and hospital clinicians have unique knowledge of which factors contribute to children's mental health concerns and which services are needed to prevent mental health crises. When hospital clinicians take advantage of their experiences in caring for children who are experiencing mental health crises, they can develop innovative approaches to improve children's access to mental health services.

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