

Dr. Jay W. Lee Mental Health Interview

What role do family physicians play in providing mental health care?

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One of the most important things that family docs do is to provide comprehensive care. And a big piece of the comprehensiveness is around understanding the dynamic between a patient's mental health and their physical health and how they interact with their community.

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And so often times I'm delving into questions about mental health and mental awareness so that I can better understand where patients coming from and how I can best help them.

How do family physicians screen for mental health concerns and guide patients through treatment options?

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Yeah, there's, there's general sort of screening tools that can be used that are validated. Often times these are used kind of during intake to, to screen for issues.

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I also, you know, quite honestly, there's, there's sort of I would call the Spidey senses. When I walk into a room and I sort of feel the vibe of a patient, it sometimes will trigger me to ask, you know, how are things going?

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And more often than not, I'm right that something is bothering somebody and it provides an opportunity for me to have a conversation with them.

Mental health can be a sensitive subject. How can family physicians encourage patients to talk about and address their mental health?

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I think the bottom line is it's about trust and it's about the longitudinal relationships that we would build with our patients.

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It's hard on a one-off visit to really kind of delve in there and sometimes it's actually maybe viewed as inappropriate to kind of have that conversation or to open that up. But as you get to know patients more beyond a 15 or 20 minute visit, there is that level of trust.

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And that trust is based on the fact that you're the family physician is there to really help the patient get the things out of the healthcare system that they need. And the more you're able to do that, the more that the patient's able to trust you.

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And sometimes you don't even have to ask questions. You just, you can just kind of walk in and they'll just basically share with you exactly what's going on.

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And you know, I often would say to residents when I talk at the residency program, you know, they

come to me and they say the patient's crying. And I would say, well, did you make them cry or did you allow them to cry? And you know, as long as you're not making a patient cry and you're allowing them to cry, it means that you're creating a trust, trusting space for them to be open with you and to be vulnerable if anything.

What is your message to anyone who needs mental health care but doesn't know where to start?

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If there's one thing that good that came out of the pandemic, I think it was an increased awareness of among the public of the critical nature of good mental health and well-being.

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And so I think if you are feeling stuck or you're feeling alone or you're feeling disconnected from the world, it's really good to reach out for help and to say, hey, you know, I'm not feeling right.

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You don't need to know exactly what's going on with you, but but it would be good to reach out to your family physician, your trusted other people in your community to begin that conversation because there are things that we can do beyond listening to help get you the resources that you might need.

Physicians need to take care of their own mental health as well. How do you encourage other physicians to prioritize their own well-being?

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It's important for us in order to feel like we're being the most effective as possible in terms of caring for patients. We need to be as present and aware of our own baggage for lack of a better way of putting it, our own.

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The the things that are weighing us down, the things that are causing us to feel burnt are the are the same things that can contribute to a patient's feeling of lack of well-being. So it's really important to be aware and to be tuned in to your own sense of well-being.

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And you know, the Academy and offers resources for family physicians to be able to not only be self aware, but also to work to have some tools to be able to work on addressing some of these sort of structural issues that may be impacting us and preventing us from being the best doctors that we could be.