

# SMART Medical Clearance: A Community Collaboration

By Aileen Wetzel, Executive Director

PATIENTS IN MENTAL HEALTH crisis frequently present to one of the Sacramento region's Emergency Departments (ED) for medical evaluation and treatment. Many individuals present with symptoms consistent with psychiatric illness without underlying organic disease. These patients are frequently "boarded" in the ED, oftentimes for days, until inpatient psychiatric beds become available and the transfer process is completed. This results in extended wait times, increased lengths of stay, and higher risks of adverse outcomes for all ED patients.

Bearing witness to an unprecedented increase in the number of patients in mental health crisis seeking treatment in local EDs, the Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society (SSVMS) published a white paper, "*Crisis in the Emergency Department: Removing Barriers to Timely and Appropriate Mental Health Treatment*," (July 2015) to frame the issue and to set forth recommendations to ensure that patients receive timely access to care. One of the recommendations put forth by SSVMS to improve the quality of care for patients experiencing mental crises was to standardize the medical clearance process across all EDs and inpatient psychiatric treatment programs to facilitate the timely transfer of patients to appropriate treatment centers.

To achieve this goal, SSVMS brought together specialists in the fields of emergency medicine and psychiatry to develop and implement a standardized medical clearance process using the SMART Medical Clearance algorithm, an acronym that drives real-time medical decision-making through a series of specific questions. The SMART algorithm was designed using an evidence-based approach through review of peer-reviewed articles

and studies, as well as consultation with experts in the fields of psychiatry and emergency medicine, both locally and nationally.

The SMART Medical Clearance form was piloted at Mercy San Juan Medical Center under the guidance of Dr. Seth Thomas, and at U.C. Davis Health System, under the leadership of Dr. Aimee Moulin (see Dr. Moulin's article, *Stop the Madness: A Smarter Way of Medical Clearance*, in this issue). Dr. Amy Barnhorst, an emergency psychiatrist, was instrumental in ensuring a successful implementation at the Sacramento County Mental Health Treatment Center, and Dr. Kevin Jones is leading the implementation team within Sutter Health's EDs. The work of this group is an example of how SSVMS excels at convening physicians from all specialties and modes of practice to address issues impacting our community.

The SMART process, design, and implementation was a collaborative effort between emergency medicine and psychiatric physicians, facilitated by SSVMS. To encourage collaboration between the EDs and the inpatient psychiatric facilities, SSVMS supports a Quality Improvement process that assists with identifying and addressing outliers at both the referring and receiving facilities. SMART Medical Clearance has generated significant interest in medical communities across the state and country. To learn more about the literature behind the development of SMART Medical Clearance, visit [www.SMARTMedicalClearance.org](http://www.SMARTMedicalClearance.org).

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