THINKING AND ACTING MORE BROADLY

How psychologists can draw upon the full breadth of their psychological training

By Arthur C. Evans, PhD
Chief Executive Officer and Executive Vice President
APA Practice Organization and the American Psychological Association

While it’s unclear how new models of health care financing, policy debates at the federal and state levels and other societal trends will affect the practice of psychology, psychologists’ unique training and skillset position us to take advantage of opportunities that will emerge from this rapidly changing healthcare landscape.

As a practicing psychologist, you can prepare for the future by extending your focus beyond traditional practice settings.

When you’re not seeing patients, you could schedule a time to meet with members of the local school system or a community organization. Find out how you can help develop new strategies to address some of the complex issues that children and their families experience in their daily lives, including coping with violence in their communities or the effects of a natural disaster. Boston-based psychologist Charmain Jackman, PhD, is just one clinician in private practice who is making an impact in the local school system and living up to her professional motto of “giving psychology away.” Dr. Jackman is the director of health and wellness at the Boston Arts Academy, where she works with young artists and their families to address mental health concerns that they are facing now or could encounter in the future. (See story on page 16.)

Integrated care is another area where we know practicing psychologists are employing interventions that are improving the quality of health care and changing the way it’s delivered. Psychologists are using the latest research and practice tools to serve patients who have behavioral and physical health conditions. For instance, more and more psychologists are working in pediatric clinics. Most people begin to exhibit signs of behavioral health problems at a very young age. By intervening early, and serving children in primary care, psychologists can help prevent these issues from turning into larger health problems down the road. Psychological interventions at this stage can also help to reduce health care costs.

Paul Kettlewell, PhD, witnessed this firsthand while working as the director of pediatric psychology at Geisinger Health System in Pennsylvania. In addition to providing outpatient care, psychologists built a positive reputation within Geisinger by conducting crisis evaluations in the ER. Geisinger granted hospital privileges to psychologists, which led to increased opportunities to reach more patients with comorbid mental and physical health conditions in their Children’s Hospital and in pediatric primary care sites. Since adding psychologists to their clinics, Geisinger has reported lower pharmacy expenses and reduced health care expenditures. Now, Kettlewell is extending his expertise to help our profession practice more broadly as one of the new members of the Committee for the Advancement of Professional Practice (CAPP). (See page 24 about new CAPP members.)

I could highlight many more stories of practicing psychologists who have stepped outside of the traditional psychotherapy role and found ways to improve the quality of health care in their communities. The health care industry will continue to change in significant ways. Psychologists need to play an integral role in this process, working with other providers and policymakers, to demonstrate the viability and strength of our profession. To get there, we need to both think and practice more broadly to identify and embrace the areas where we can effect meaningful change on behalf of our communities and our nation.