

Title

Statewide Elder Mistreatment Virtual Assessment Program

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Source

[Webinar recording located here](#)

Summary of Research

Elder mistreatment is a national problem and each year more and more reports are being made to Adult Protective Services (APS). Charged with investigating these incidents, APS often finds many of their clients in need of an evaluation by a licensed professional, other than themselves, before a comprehensive protective service plan can be put in place. Many clients are in need of mental health assessments to determine if they're able to continue living on their own or make decisions that are in their best interest. A client's functional and decision-making capacity for directing their own lives is a civil right and thus, the determination that someone lacks capacity and needs supervision often requires the opinion of a medical or psychiatric professional. In the absence of these assessments the older adult may remain at-risk for continued mistreatment or consequent harm. Unfortunately, access to professionals for providing these critical assessments and opinions is not often an option and if they are they may not be timely. Reasons vary, but include the clients inability to leave the home, their unwillingness to leave the home, a limited geriatric and psychiatric workforce or a physicians unwillingness to declare their patient to lack capacity because they have not seen them in an extended period of time. Regardless, the problem continues to exist and innovative solutions are needed. In 2017, the Texas Elder Abuse and Mistreatment Institute launched a statewide elder mistreatment assessment program (www.facntx.org) which utilizes technology in the forms of a web-based communication portal and video-phone conferencing to allow every APS caseworker and their clients access to geriatric, psychiatric and elder mistreatment experts located in Houston Texas. This program is called the TEAM-Forensic Assessment Center Network (TEAM-FACN). It is a partnership between Texas APS and The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, McGovern Medical School. Using a web-based communication and referral portal Texas APS caseworkers can request a variety of services from the TEAM-FACN physicians. All information regarding these requests and responses to the requests flow through and are housed in the HIPAA secure portal. The services include medical assessments, mental health assessments, forensic records reviews for abuse determinations, case consultations, and employee misconduct registry reviews. The most commonly requested service is mental health assessments. The majority of these mental health assessments are carried out using the video-phone conferencing platform offered through FaceTime using iPhones and Ipads. This approach allows a caseworker and their client, regardless of living in urban or rural Texas, critical and timely access to TEAM-FACN medical and mental health professionals with elder mistreatment expertise located in the Houston Texas Medical Center. Within the first year of implementation the number of cases worked by the Houston-based team increased 5-fold growing from a historical average of 100 per year to over 500. Within the first 3-months all APS districts across the state had utilized the TEAM-FACN services. Each client received an average of 2 services from the TEAM-FACN physicians resulting in over 1000 services provided to APS and their clients from geriatric and elder mistreatment experts to facilitate protective service planning. The efforts of TEAM-FACN have been able to bring expertise, access and efficiency to the entire state by leaving no caseworker or their client without access to much needed assessments. Some of these have resulted in substantial justice for the victims while others have resulted in enhanced protective service planning and implementation.



National Adult Protective Services Association
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Research to Practice Series

Practice & Policy Implications

The TEAM-FACN program provides an evidence-based approach for APS agencies to access medical and mental health professionals in their communities and around their states for critical and timely assessments. The use of the web-based platforms allows professionals anywhere in the state to collaborate and work cases within a HIPAA secure system. The video-phone conferencing allows the medical or mental health professional to be in the home of the client, albeit remotely, when assessing the client. This meets the client where they are, increases efficiency and allows the assessor to see the clients functional ability within the home environment; information critical and often not available when a client travels outside the home to an office setting. Most states have policies that allow for telehealth and thus, makes this type of service allowable especially from the mental health perspective. Nothing is done during the virtual or remote mental health assessments that is not performed during the in-person assessments; a common stipulation of telehealth. The approach established by the TEAM-FACN is scalable given the use of available technology. While it may take some technological adjustments for APS programs the TEAM-FACN provides a model for similar programs that may wish to use other technology. This approach also provides a way for states or counties with medical schools or other professionals to be able to work together for mutual benefit. APS gets their clients the help they need in a timely manner while more and more professionals get exposed to elder mistreatment and trained in assessing them for protective service planning.

Further Reading

Burnett J, Dyer CB, Clark LE & Halphen JM. A Statewide Elder Mistreatment Virtual Assessment Program: Preliminary Data. *J Am Geriatric Soc.*, 2018, 00:1-5.

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