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Addressing the Need and Expanding Access

CGH set to open new Behavioral Health Unit in 2021

All of us know or love someone who has a mental health issue. The last thing you want for them during a mental crisis is to be transferred from the hospital to a facility more than an hour away for their behavioral health care. For this reason, CGH Medical Center is proud to open our new 10-bed Behavioral Health Unit in early 2021.

“It doesn’t matter how many times a patient with mental illness comes into the Emergency Department ... they can’t get better with that care alone,” said Sarah Alvarez-Brown, CGH Emergency Department Director. “To have this unit here at CGH — and to be able to establish that continuity of care without sending the patient out of the area — will be a huge asset to our community and to our patients.”

What is a behavioral health unit?

Sometimes called a psychiatric unit, a behavioral health unit (BHU) is an area of the hospital designed specifically for providing care for reasons related to mental health. These issues can include minor episodes of stress, anxiety and depression, along with alcohol dependence or drug use. This also includes more serious conditions such as major depression, panic attacks, bipolar disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and even more severe issues such as suicidal or homicidal thoughts. People typically need care in a BHU

because their symptoms are serious and unstable, or they are at risk for harming themselves or others. The main goal of the unit is to provide a safe, secure setting where adults can receive treatment and move beyond the immediate crisis.

“The Whiteside County Community Health Plan indicated that mental health admissions were the most needed service that CGH was currently unable to provide,” said Kristie Geil, Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer. “The goal of the new unit is to help care for patients closer to home and closer to family that can help be involved in the patient’s care.”

The unit will consist of 10 beds (four semi-private rooms and two private), along with inpatient therapy groups run by all levels of professionals. Anupama Upadhyay, MD*, and Lorri Mostad, MSN,



Behavioral Health Unit Therapists (L-R): Amy Meyer, Clinical Therapist, and Michelle Kelly, Behavioral Health Specialist



Anupama Upadhyay, MD*
Psychiatrist



Lorri Mostad
Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner



Sarah Alvarez-Brown
Operations Director,
Behavioral Health Unit

APRN, PMHNP-BC, will be available seven days a week to provide psychiatric diagnostic and prescribing services to adult inpatients.

What treatment can patients expect?

Once the unit opens, if a community member feels like they are in need of mental health care, they would present to the CGH Emergency Department to complete a medical screening exam. This exam rules out medical conditions that can also trigger psychological symptoms. They will then be evaluated by Sinnissippi Centers, and if they meet the inpatient criteria of our unit, will be admitted.

Treatment in the following days will be tailored to each patient's individual needs. However, part of our philosophy with patient care in this unit will be that patients will work together, hold each other accountable and help each other get well.

"Patients will not be in their rooms a majority of the time," said Dr. Upadhyay. "They're not getting better in their room ... and their treatment will not be in their room. The idea is to engage our patients in active therapy so that we can really help them learn the life skills, problem-solving skills and symptom-management skills necessary for them to be successful outside of the hospital."

"I really plan to engage our patients in the importance of their outpatient therapy to prevent rehospitalization," said Mostad. "My goal is to help patients learn how to stay out of the hospital and help them realize that sometimes hospitalization isn't the worst thing to happen to them. Sometimes it can be a really good thing to help get people stabilized and get a fresh look at what's going on with their mental health. From there, we can work together to develop a plan that not only helps their outpatient care be more successful, but also gives them an opportunity to learn about all of the community-based treatment and support services that are available to help them outside of the hospital."

A different patient experience ... close to home

"CGH is very fortunate to have so much community support for the work that we will be doing," said Geil. "The Whiteside County Healthier Communities Partnership includes all of the agencies that have been working with us through the entire planning and building process." These agencies include the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Sinnissippi Centers, the Whiteside County Health Department, United Way, city and county police departments,



While providing natural light for a therapeutic environment, patient rooms in the new unit meet all safety codes and standards required for behavioral health facilities.

and so many more. "I hope the entire community looks at this project with great pride about what is being done to ensure that this kind of care is available not only for our patients suffering from mental illnesses, but also for their family members ... to help enable them to get the care they need close to home."

"It really excites me to operate here in conjunction with the community's resources and CGH's mission, vision and values," added Mostad. "You combine that with a need that we really have in the community, and I see good things happening. I'm really excited to see how our patients feel when they can get a totally different experience than what they've had in their own community."

May Is Mental Health Month

In addition to the CGH Behavioral Health Unit, the Sauk Valley area has several local resources available for mental health support. The confidential B-CALM help line — **888-33B-CALM (2256)** — is available from 8 AM-5 PM Monday through Friday and is sponsored as a free service in partnership with the CGH Health Foundation and Sinnissippi Centers. If you are in crisis, please call Sinnissippi Centers' 24/7 Crisis Hotline at **800-242-7642** or the Whiteside County Health Department Behavioral Health Department at **815-626-2230, ext. 1291**. For access to additional information, referrals and agencies, or crisis response, please call **2-1-1** (or **888-865-9903**).