

PSYCHIATRIC PHARMACISTS: ENSURING PATIENT SAFETY

Serving Veterans in Georgia

Dr. Dana Chiulli is a psychiatric pharmacist at the Ralph H. Johnson Veterans Affairs (VA) Outpatient Clinic in Savannah, Georgia, a satellite of the VA Hospital in Charleston, South Carolina.

After spending two years providing telehealth care from the VA hospital in Charleston, the chief of mental health saw an opportunity to increase access and serve Veterans at the outpatient clinic in Savannah.

As the only psychiatric pharmacist at her clinic, Dr. Chiulli is a versatile member who provides a variety of services as part of the interprofessional treatment team.

Going Where the Veterans Need Help

Dr. Chiulli treats patients in four different settings, depending on their location and needs, through a VA scope of practice, which allows her to prescribe medications.

In a primary care clinic, Dr. Chiulli manages medications for patients with depression, anxiety, and insomnia.

In a general mental health clinic, she prescribes medications for veterans with PTSD and severe mental illness, such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

Part of her time is scheduled, with 6-8 patient appointments per day. The remainder of her day consists of “open access” appointments where she and three mental health therapists share availability for prompt assessments of veterans’ urgent mental health needs.

Finally, some of her services are provided via video connection to veterans in rural areas who prefer the convenience of electronic access to care from their home or office.



“Psychiatric pharmacists are highly qualified members of our mental health teams. Their expertise is so value-added that **I am actively increasing the number of these individuals in my service line.**”

*-Dr. Hugh Myrick, MD
Chief, Mental Health Services
Ralph H Johnson VAMC*

IMPROVING SAFETY

From October 1, 2018 to January 31, 2019, a psychiatric pharmacist provided monitoring to improve veterans' safe and effective use of lithium.



91% of patients had appropriate lithium monitoring completed, an increase from 76% before clinical pharmacy services were added ($p < 0.05$)



22% of patients had their lithium changed to a safer or more effective regimen

“Dr. Chiulli receives **rave reviews from veterans, colleagues, and supervisors for her compassionate and thorough approach to care.** She brings unique skills, such as managing the complex needs of pregnant veterans who do not have an abundance of resources otherwise in our system.”

- *Emily Bower, PhD*
Staff Psychologist, Primary Care
Mental Health Integration

Underserved Veterans

Dr. Chiulli is skilled in working with female veterans who are pregnant or planning pregnancy to weigh the risks and benefits of medications for both the mother and fetus. Especially with her expertise in drug safety, she is able to provide the information and insights that veterans can use to make informed decisions.

Putting Her Skills and Training to Work

Dr. Chiulli feels fortunate to work in a place that allows her to use all of her skills and training. She recalls a young man who was referred to her after functioning poorly on six concurrent psychiatric medications. After many months of gradually reducing his medications with Dr. Chiulli's help, he is now enjoying his family and is more productive at work. His daughter even said “whatever the pharmacist has you on, never run out of it!”

VA psychiatric pharmacists base their recommendations on scientific evidence. They are also trained to listen to their patients' experience with medications. Dr. Chiulli teaches her residents: “It's not about proving how much you know. It's about the patient. We need to do what's in the best interest of the patient.”

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