



Integrated Health Care for an Aging Population

A Fact Sheet for Consumers

Older People Have a Right to Quality Integrated Health Care

Facing illness is a time of great stress. At times our complicated health care system can add to this stress. Integrated health care can help.

What Is Integrated Health Care?

- ♦ Integrated health care addresses physical and psychological health care needs.
- ♦ Integrated health care is coordinated among a team of health professionals who provide your treatment.

Why Is Integrated Health Care Important to You and Your Family?

- ♦ Physical and mental health affect each other. It is important to pay attention to both.
- ♦ Older people generally have more than one illness or disability and are involved with more than one health care professional. Integrated care is a plan to coordinate your treatment.
- ♦ Life experiences, health conditions, and your age, sex, class, race, religion, and family life can affect whether you receive good health care. These things are considered when care is provided in an integrated way.

How Psychologist Team Members Can Help

- ♦ Psychologists help older adults understand how emotions and memory can affect physical health. For example, if you feel nervous and begin suffering daily headaches, a psychologist can help you learn how to cope with the stress so that the headaches disappear—treating the cause (stress), not just the symptom (headache).
- ♦ Many health problems, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and pain, require taking medications, staying on a proper diet, and exercising on a regular basis. A psychologist can help you include these healthy behaviors in your everyday life.



- ♦ Working with a psychologist often lessens the need for medication. For example, high blood pressure can often be treated successfully with relaxation techniques and by learning and using effective coping strategies.
- ♦ With your agreement, a psychologist can work with all members of your health care team and your family members and friends to improve how care is delivered.
- ♦ Remember, your physical health influences your mood, and your mood influences your physical health. Knowing this and taking charge of both is good integrated care.

Here's What You Can Do

- ♦ Let your doctors know what you think about your care. If you are not sure what might help, ask questions to get more information.
- ♦ Let your primary care provider know about any psychological, emotional, or mental health concerns. For example, if you have been feeling low, nervous, or have been forgetting things, let your doctor know. It could be a medical or psychological problem or a combination of both.
- ♦ If memory or mood is a concern, ask to see a psychologist for a complete assessment and treatment.
- ♦ Ask for a list of your medications from each of your providers. Share this list with all members of your team. The number one problem in the hospitalization of older adults is excessive medication use.
- ♦ It may be up to you to create your own integrated health care team. Encourage your health care providers to talk with each other and work together to carefully review and address your problems. Give them each other's business cards or phone numbers to help in this process.
- ♦ Remember, getting integrated care is your right. It can be an overwhelming task when serious illness strikes or disabilities flare. So plan ahead, talk to your health care providers now, and encourage them to talk to one another!
- ♦ Above all, have confidence that you can coordinate your own health care! It will make a great difference to your health and to your quality of life in the long run.