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Heart of Texas Community Health Center wins TAFP behavioral health integration prize

The Heart of Texas Community Health Center of Waco, Texas, has won the Texas Academy of Family Physicians' Behavioral Health Integration Innovators Competition. The prize was awarded to three primary care clinics in Texas that have shown extraordinary innovation in integrating behavioral health services into their practices.

"This award affirms our team's commitment to transformation and innovation," said Lance Kelley, PhD, Clinical Psychologist and Director of Human Behavior and Mental Health. "Our leaders foster a culture of trust, shared vision, and freedom to take risks that allows for new solutions to local behavioral health challenges to emerge and flourish. The opportunity to share our story is energizing and orienting, as we recount not only what we've been doing but remembering as a team why we've done it."

Integrating behavioral health services like psychiatry and addiction treatment into primary care clinics improves health outcomes for patients, yet many primary care physicians find it difficult to provide access to these services.

"The Family Health Center aims to provide the highest quality primary health care to our community's most vulnerable," said Dr. Jackson Griggs, Chief Executive Officer of Family Health Center. "This award reinforces that aspiration and gives us further confidence that we are serving our neighbors in key areas of need. Integration of behavioral health is essential to high-functioning primary care. We are happy to be training future family physicians in a pioneering model that addresses all elements of the quadruple aim."

Heart of Texas Community Health Center employs an innovative model of care in which physicians collaborate with what they call "integrated health managers." These health professionals are licensed clinical social workers who receive special training in behavioral health and chronic care management. As core members of the primary care team, they work alongside physicians and other health professionals to ensure consistent screening and treatment for patients in need of mental health services.

The clinic also developed psychopharmacology decision support tools in consultation with the Harvard Medical School Department of Psychiatry to support their behavioral health team. And since Heart of Texas Community Health Center is a family medicine residency program, they provide valuable exposure to the integrated behavioral health model for family doctors in training.

TAFP developed the Behavioral Health Integration Innovators Competition to highlight best practices around the state for providing these services in primary care settings. The prize comes with a \$10,000 award and the opportunity to share details of the integration model with other practices in hopes that more primary care clinics will invest in providing integrated behavioral health services to their patients.

The Texas Academy of Family Physicians is the premier membership organization dedicated to uniting the family doctors of Texas through advocacy, education and member services, and empowering them to provide a medical home for patients of all ages. It has 32 local chapters and is a chapter of the American Academy of Family Physicians. Visit www.tafp.org for more information.