

Background

- The U.S. is currently experiencing a mental health crisis, with nearly 25% of adults suffering from a mental health disorder, and 29% unsure of where to seek mental health services.¹
- This significant demand for mental health services, combined with a shortage of psychiatrists, underscores the urgent need to integrate mental health services into primary care settings.

Method

- We analyzed 2023 national workforce data to determine how frequently PAs in five specialties screen, diagnose, treat, manage, and refer patients with mental health disorders.
- We examined PAs practicing in psychiatry, family medicine/general practice, emergency medicine, general internal medicine, and general pediatrics.
- NCCPA 2023 data from 2023 included responses from 126,941 PAs who provided or updated their responses to the specialty question in the *PA Professional Profile* within the past three years.
- The data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics and bivariate analyses conducted using SPSS.

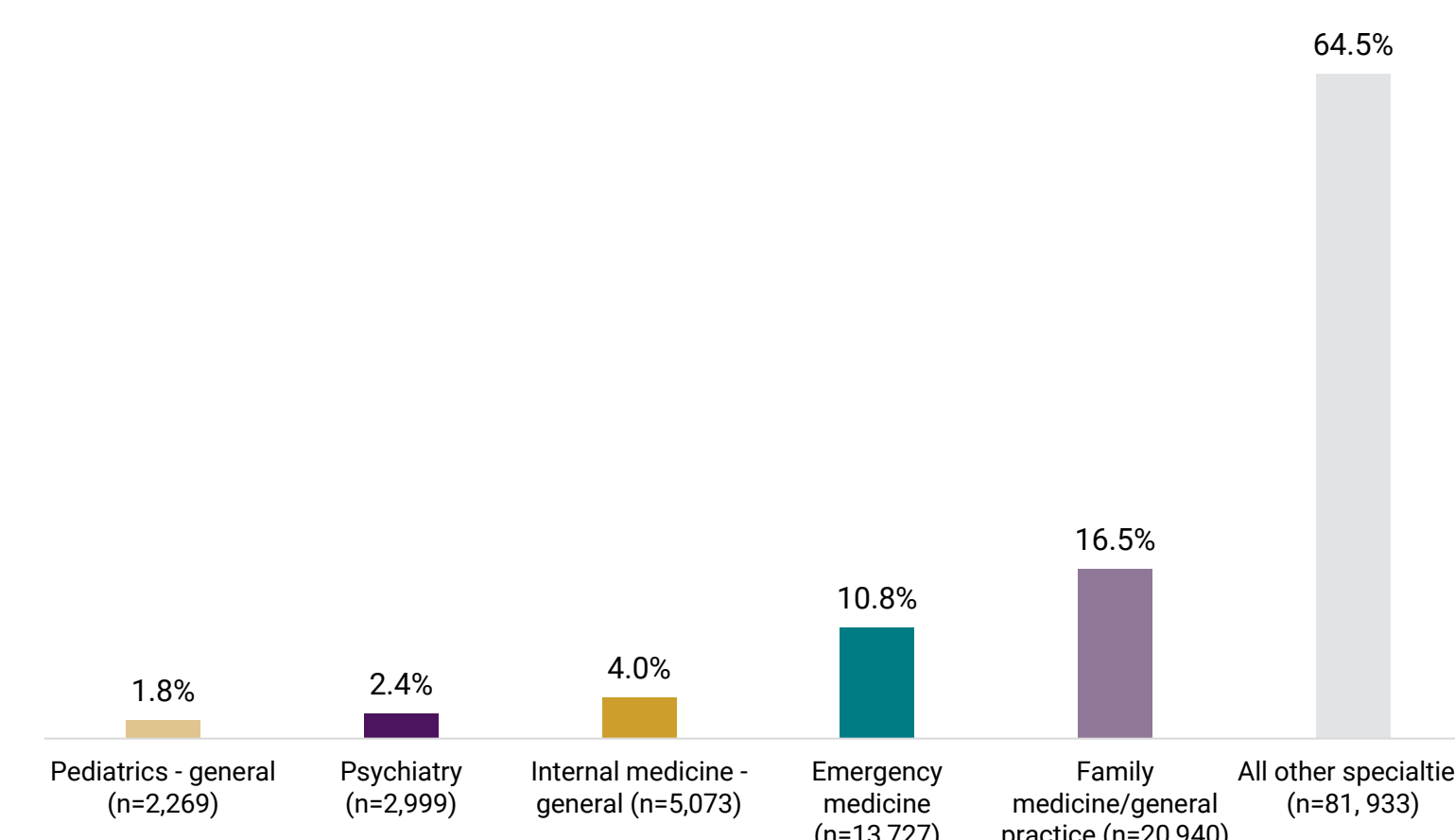
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Characteristics of PAs Practicing in Psychiatry vs. PAs Practicing in Other Medical Disciplines							
	Psychiatry	Internal Medicine	Family Medicine/General Practice	Pediatrics	Emergency Medicine	All Other Specialties	P-value
Age:							
Mean (SD)	40.8 (11.5)	43.6 (11.9)	43.2 (11.5)	40.7 (10.7)	41.1 (10.5)	40.6 (10.6)	<0.001
Median (IQR)	38 (31-48)	42 (34-52)	41 (34-51)	39 (32-47)	39 (33-48)	38 (32-47)	
Gender:							
Female	72.9%	72.3%	68.8%	85.6%	58.3%	71.8%	<0.001
Male	27.1%	27.7%	31.2%	14.4%	41.7%	28.2%	
Race:							
White	80.7%	78.6%	83.3%	85.2%	83.9%	84.7%	
Asian	7.4%	9.1%	5.8%	5.7%	6.2%	6.8%	
Black/African American	5.1%	5.4%	3.8%	3.0%	3.7%	3.2%	<0.001
Multi-race	3.2%	2.6%	2.6%	2.4%	2.6%	2.3%	
Other*	3.6%	4.2%	4.5%	3.7%	3.6%	3.1%	
Ethnicity:							
Non-Hispanic/Latino(a/x)	93.1%	91.0%	90.7%	87.8%	93.2%	93.8%	<0.001
Hispanic/Latino(a/x)	6.9%	9.0%	9.3%	12.2%	6.8%	6.2%	
Speaks another language:							
No	79.4%	71.3%	73.6%	66.2%	72.2%	80.1%	<0.001
Yes	20.6%	28.7%	26.4%	33.8%	27.8%	19.9%	
Urban/rural setting:							
Urban	94.0%	92.3%	84.7%	91.4%	92.3%	94.8%	<0.001
Rural/Isolated	6.0%	7.7%	15.3%	8.6%	7.7%	5.2%	
Highest degree:							
Bachelor's	8.6%	17.4%	15.4%	13.4%	12.2%	13.0%	
Master's	85.0%	76.5%	79.0%	83.2%	82.3%	83.1%	
Doctorate	4.6%	3.3%	2.6%	1.5%	3.0%	2.0%	<0.001
Other	1.8%	2.8%	3.0%	1.8%	2.5%	1.8%	
Practice setting:							
Hospital	15.7%	19.0%	8.5%	10.8%	79.9%	46.9%	
Office-based private practice	46.1%	56.5%	50.6%	73.1%	3.6%	36.7%	<0.001
Other	38.2%	24.6%	40.9%	16.1%	16.4%	16.4%	
Secondary position:							
No, I work in only one clinical position	83.0%	85.4%	86.3%	89.2%	72.1%	86.8%	<0.001
Yes, I work in two or more PA positions (clinical or not)	17.0%	14.6%	13.7%	10.8%	27.9%	13.2%	
Caring for underserved population:							
No/Not sure	68.8%	73.7%	63.1%	62.5%	70.5%	81.3%	<0.001
Yes	31.2%	26.3%	36.9%	37.5%	29.5%	18.7%	
Patients seen per week:							
Mean (SD)	62.0 (36.0)	66.7 (39.1)	73.5 (37.1)	83.2 (43.4)	77.0 (40.7)	62.3 (42.3)	<0.001
Median (IQR)	60 (40-80)	60 (45-80)	70 (50-90)	80 (55-100)	70 (50-100)	50 (35-80)	
Hours worked per week:							
Mean (SD)	38.7 (9.5)	39.2 (11.3)	38.6 (11.0)	35.5 (10.3)	37.8 (9.9)	40.5 (10.3)	<0.001
Median (IQR)	40 (36-40)	40 (36-45)	40 (36-40)	40 (42-40)	40 (35-40)	40 (40-45)	
Telemedicine participation:							
No	22.0%	36.4%	33.9%	46.8%	83.6%	61.8%	<0.001
Yes	78.0%	63.6%	66.1%	53.2%	16.4%	38.2%	

*Other includes: other races, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native.

Results

Counts and Percent of Five Medical Specialties Examined



Frequency of Screening, Diagnosing, Treating, Managing, and Referring Patients with Mental Health Disorders by PAs in Psychiatry

Proportion of patients who need treatment for mental health disorders	
<25%	1.2%
26 to 50%	1.6%
51 to 75%	2.0%
76 to 100%	95.2%
Encounter patients you believe need treatment for mental disorders	
Daily	95.7%
Weekly	2.8%
Less frequently	1.5%
Screen patients for mental health disorders	
Daily	95.8%
Weekly	2.6%
Less frequently	1.7%
Diagnose mental health disorders	
Daily	92.7%
Weekly	5.0%
Less frequently	2.3%
Initiate treatment for mental health disorders	
Daily	93.2%
Weekly	4.7%
Less frequently	2.2%
Implement treatment for patients with mental disorders	
Daily	94.8%
Weekly	2.9%
Less frequently	2.2%
Make referrals for patients with mental disorders	
Daily	55.9%
Weekly	19.6%
Less frequently	24.6%

Frequency of Screening, Diagnosing, Treating, Managing and Referring Patients with Mental Health Disorders by Specialty

	Internal Medicine	Family Medicine/General Practice	Pediatrics	Emergency Medicine	All Other Specialties	p-value
Proportion of patients who need treatment for mental health disorders						
<25%	38.0%	42.6%	62.5%	73.7%	70.5%	
26 to 50%	39.0%	36.0%	28.6%	19.8%	19.5%	
51 to 75%	15.1%	15.1%	6.9%	4.6%	6.3%	<0.001
76 to 100%	7.8%	6.2%	2.0%	1.9%	3.7%	
Encounter patients you believe need treatment for mental disorders						
Daily	55.7%	59.0%	44.3%	50.5%	20.3%	
Weekly	32.0%	29.5%	39.7%	35.3%	32.2%	
Monthly	8.7%	8.4%	12.2%	9.9%	23.6%	
Yearly	1.3%	1.4%	1.8%	1.6%	8.0%	<0.001
Less than yearly	1.3%	0.9%	0.9%	1.4%	7.5%	
Never	1.0%	0.8%	1.1%	1.2%	8.5%	
Screen patients for mental health disorders						
Daily	63.5%	70.6%	72.3%	47.7%	16.5%	
Weekly	18.6%	16.5%	15.2%	27.1%	14.2%	
Monthly	6.9%	5.1%	4.9%	9.7%	10.8%	
Yearly	4.5%	3.1%	3.9%	2.1%	5.5%	<0.001
Less than yearly	1.9%	1.6%	0.9%	3.3%	11.0%	
Never	4.6%	3.1%	2.9%	10.1%	42.0%	
Diagnose mental health disorders						
Daily	29.9%	34.1%	20.0%	16.6%	3.5%	
Weekly	39.7%	40.3%	42.2%	26.8%	8.8%	
Monthly	16.6%	15.7%	22.3%	19.9%	12.8%	
Yearly	3.0%	2.5%	3.1%	5.8%	6.4%	<0.001
Less than yearly	2.8%	2.3%	2.4%	7.0%	10.4%	
Never	8.0%	5.2%	10.0%	23.9%	58.1%	
Initiate treatment for mental health disorders						
Daily	25.3%	29.0%	12.4%	12.8%	3.0%	
Weekly	39.7%	41.5%	31.9%	22.5%	7.8%	
Monthly	19.5%	18.0%	28.5%	20.6%	12.2%	
Yearly	3.1%	3.0%	4.8%	8.2%	6.6%	<0.001
Less than yearly	3.2%	2.4%	3.9%	8.7%	9.4%	
Never	9.2%	6.1%	18.5%	27.2%	61.0%	
Implement treatment for patients with mental disorders						
Daily	36.1%	39.3%	18.5%	11.3%	4.8%	
Weekly	34.7%	35.1%	33.6%	19.6%	8.5%	
Monthly	14.4%	14.0%	22.9%	16.6%	9.8%	
Yearly	2.5%	2.6%	5.0%	6.8%	5.0%	<0.001
Less than yearly	3.2%	2.4%	3.9%	9.2%	7.8%	
Never	9.0%	6.6%	16.1%	36.5%	64.2%	
Make referrals for patients with mental disorders						
Daily	21.7%	20.9%	19.5%	24.0%	4.3%	
Weekly	41.6%	42.7%	50.8%	39.3%	15.3%	
Monthly	26.7%	28.2%	23.1%	21.3%	23.1%	
Yearly	4.1%	4.2%	3.2%	5.6%	15.8%	<0.001
Less than yearly	2.6%	1.9%	1.4%	3.7%	16.1%	
Never	3.3%	2.1%	2.0%	6.1%	25.3%	

In primary care settings (including family medicine, internal medicine, and pediatrics), about 30-40% of PAs diagnose and initiate treatment for patients with mental health disorders on a weekly basis.

Key Findings & Conclusion

- Over 90% of PAs in psychiatry screen, diagnose, initiate treatment, and implement treatment maintenance for patients with mental disorders daily.
- PAs in pediatrics (72.3%), family medicine/general practice (70.6%), internal medicine (63.5%), and emergency medicine (47.7%) report screening patients for mental disorders daily.
- Most PAs in primary care and emergency medicine also make referrals daily/weekly for patients with mental disorders.
- Our findings indicate that PAs in psychiatry are expanding access to mental health services.
- PAs in primary care and emergency medicine provide early detection by screening patients and referring them for specialized mental health care.

References

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