

Behavioral Emergency Response and Tele-Health Assessment

A Proposal

To

Sheriff Ed Gonzalez
Harris County Sheriff's Office



From

Major Mike Lee
Office of Mental Health and Jail Diversion Projects
Harris County Sheriff's Office

The Proposal

Utilize technology to access psychiatrists via an electronic device to assist patrol deputies responding to individuals in serious mental health crises. Dr. Avrim Fishkind approached Frank Webb proposing this project.

The Entities Involved

JSA Health Corporation



Avrim Fishkind, M.D., is President and Chief Executive Officer of JSA Health Corp. Dr. Fishkind is a past president of the American Association for Emergency Psychiatry. He has designed multiple comprehensive psychiatric emergency programs across the nation. Dr. Fishkind was the first medical director of the Harris County NeuroPsychiatric Center and in 2005 he led the clinical workgroup for crisis services redesign for the state of Texas. In 2007, he formed JSA Health Tele-psychiatry (now JSA Health Corp.) to help fill critical gaps in psychiatric services vis telemedicine. JSA Health Corp. has contracts in California, Texas, Louisiana and China. His company is used in community health clinics, correctional facilities, emergency settings, and learning institutions.

Cloud 9



JC Adams is Founder/CEO of Cloud 9. Based in Austin, TX, Cloud 9 is an innovative high tech company providing technology for psychology. They have developed platforms that make accessing psychiatrists via electronic devices possible, practical, efficient, and affordable. Cloud 9 is a fully HIPAA compliant and easy to deploy communication layer. It allows health care providers to serve more patients at an affordable price.

Harris County Emergency Corps

Dr. Cameron Decker is the Medical Director of the Harris County Emergency Corps. He is also an assistant professor at Baylor College of Medicine, is the Medical Director of Emergency Medical Task Force -6, is a reserve sergeant and tactical physician for the Harris County Sheriff's Office, is a physician site reviewer for the Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services, and served as president of the Emergency Medicine Residents' Association.



Verizon Wireless



Shomari Williams is the Associate Director of Business Sales for Verizon Wireless. Verizon will be providing the devices the deputies will use to connect to a psychiatrist. Verizon was involved in a similar project, Project Ethan (Emergency TeleHealth and Navigation), involving the Houston Fire Department (HFD).

Purpose

Pilot an innovative, state-of-the-art program utilizing technology to provide real-time access to a psychiatrist for patrol deputies responding to individuals in serious mental health crises. Law enforcement officers have become the de facto social workers of the 21st century, responding to more individuals with serious mental illnesses than any mental health professional. These are some of the most difficult, time consuming, litigious, and potentially dangerous situations officers and deputies respond to. Providing direct access to a psychiatrist will help our deputies respond more professionally, safely, and appropriately and it will reduce liability.

This project is similar to Project Ethan, a project developed for the Houston Fire Department using live video chat for some patients who call 911 for minor health problems. Patients can speak live with an emergency medicine doctor through a computer tablet, potentially avoiding a long and costly ER visit. The idea is to direct some patients to primary care clinics, instead of automatically bringing them to an emergency room.

Goal/Expectations

- Establish connectivity capability between a psychiatrist and the Harris County Sheriff's Office through the Verizon-provided devices and network.
- Establish patient satisfaction and suitability for telemedicine evaluations.
- Measure the time it takes to conduct and evaluation and the length of evaluations. Project Ethan evaluations take 10 - 15 minutes to conduct. We expect psychiatric evaluations to take 15 - 20 minutes.
- Measure the impact on transportation of patients to either emergency departments, Ben Taub Hospital, or to the NeuroPsychiatric Center. Our goal is to reduce the long transport of patients, reduce the time deputies spend on these calls, and return them to service quicker.
- In measuring transportation, establish what community resources will need to be developed to further help reduce the need for transportation. Project Ethan uses Harris County RIDES (taxi rides) - a system we can pursue after completing the pilot.

Anticipated Outcomes

- Provide treatment in the field rather than transport of the patient. The tele-psychiatrist can call in medication prescriptions if needed. Harris County Emergency Services has expanded their formulary for psychotropic medications for this pilot program.
- Refer the patient to a community mental health clinic rather than transporting to a hospital emergency department. In some cases the patient may be able to drive him/herself. In other cases a significant other person may be able to make the transport. The tele-psychiatrist will make the determination on the appropriateness/safety of the transport. Referral to the NeuroPsychiatric Center or Ben Taub Hospital by self or significant other because patient declined clinic referral. Again, the tele-psychiatrist will make the determination on the appropriateness/safety of the transport.
- Patient declined referral as stated above and receives transport by law enforcement.
- Referral to a hospital emergency department for a medical problem which will necessitate a transport by ambulance.
- Patient refuses to participate.

Program Evaluation

The software will include an evaluation component. The software will capture the amount of time the patient interacted with the psychiatrist. At the completion of the assessment by the psychiatrist, the deputy will answer a few questions on the device regarding outcome, patient satisfaction, etc. Additionally, the deputies participating in this pilot will complete an incident report on all calls where they utilize the tele-psychiatrist.

Pilot Description

Three of our Crisis Intervention Response Team deputies will participate in this pilot. They will not ride with a clinician during this time. One deputy will be assigned to day shift, one to evening shift, and one to night shift. The pilot will be conducted in a pre-determined area of the county to coincide with the area of coverage of Dr. Decker's Emergency Corps. The pilot is expected to last eight weeks or 25 telemedicine incidents, whichever comes first. Each deputy will be provided approximately two hours of training by the entities involved. The training will explain the objectives of the pilot and how to use the devices. The deputies will maintain custody of the devices for the duration of the pilot.

The deputies will access a psychiatrist via their devices on appropriate calls (determined by the deputies and parameters set out by Dr. Fishkind and Dr. Decker.) The goal is to eliminate the need to transport some consumers. In some instances the psychiatrist will prescribe medication that will be provided/administered to the patient by EMS. In other instances the consumer will self transport or be transported by a significant other. The psychiatrist will make the determination if this alternative transportation is safe/appropriate. In some instances alternatives to transporting the person to the NeuroPsychiatric Center or Ben Taub Hospital will be utilized, such as transporting the person to a community clinic.

After a psychiatrist is utilized the deputy will answer a few short questions via his/her device, e.g., outcome, patient satisfaction, deputy satisfaction, etc. The device will capture the time of the assessment.

Cost

There will be no cost to the Harris County Sheriff's Office during the pilot program.

Liability

We believe there will be decreased in liability for the deputies involved in this pilot and the agency. The deputies will be acting on decisions by a psychiatrist and, in most instances, emergency medical services personnel. A psychiatric disturbance is defined as a medical emergency by the federal government's Emergency Medical Treatment & Labor Act (EMTALA). By utilizing medial personnel on these scenes we are doing everything we can to respond appropriately and safely.

Clinton Foundation



This project has been listed as a program for former President Bill Clinton to see when he visits Houston in November for the Clinton Foundation. This is a very innovative project with significant potential that we believe will get the attention of various organizations.

First in the Nation

To our knowledge no other law enforcement agency in the nation is utilizing tele-medicine in this way. There are agencies that utilize tele-psychiatrists in their jails and courts but none to our knowledge who provide this technology to patrol officers in the field.

Memorandum of Understanding



The Mission of the Harris County Sheriff's Office is to enhance the safety and protect the trust of the citizens of Harris County by enforcing the law with integrity and professionalism.

21st Century Leading Law Enforcement Agency