

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit

## Mental Health Services for Children and Adolescents: Missed Opportunities in Primary Care & Barriers to Specialty Care

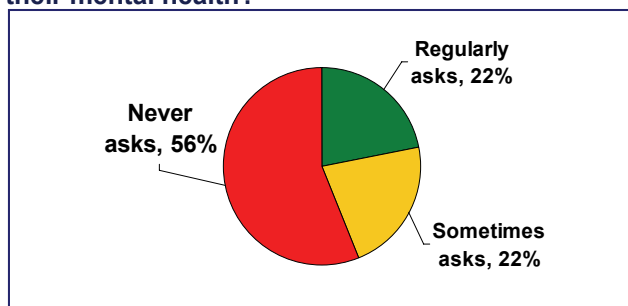
Children and adolescents may have mental health concerns that affect the way they act, feel and think. Some mental health concerns can be addressed by primary care doctors (for example, pediatricians and family doctors) who take care of general medical problems. In some cases, children and adolescents may also benefit from specialty mental health services provided by professionals such as psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers.

In August 2008, the CS Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked parents with children age 5-17 years about mental health concerns for their children who have been diagnosed with a mental health condition.

### Mental Health Concerns and Primary Care

Over one-half of parents report that their children's primary care doctor never asks whether they have concerns about their children's mental health. About one-fifth of parents say that their children's primary care doctor regularly asks about mental health concerns (Figure 1).

Figure 1. How often does your children's primary care doctor ask whether you have concerns about their mental health?



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2008

One-third of parents have talked with their children's primary care doctor about a mental health concern, and the majority of these parents (22% overall) have discussed such concerns within the past year.

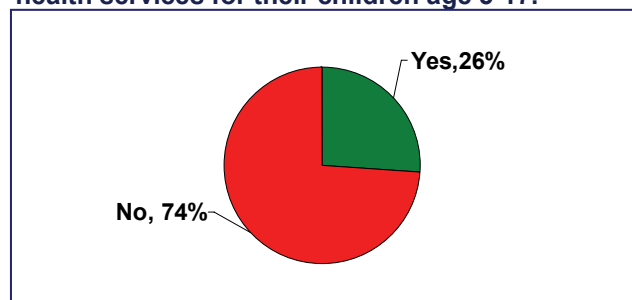
### Report Highlights

- 56% of parents say that their children's primary care doctor *never* asks whether they have concerns about their children's mental health.
- 1 out of 4 parents have used specialty mental health services for their children.
- 1 out of 5 parents have children with a mental health diagnosis.
- 25% of parents with children who have a mental health diagnosis report trouble getting specialty mental health services for their children.

### Use of Specialty Mental Health Services

One out of four parents have used specialty mental health services for their children (Figure 2), and most of these parents (15% overall) have used specialty mental health services within the past year.

Figure 2. Parents who have used specialty mental health services for their children age 5-17.



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2008

Among parents who have discussed mental health concerns with their children's primary care doctor, 62% have used specialty mental health services for their children.

## Mental Health Conditions for Youth

One out of five parents indicate that one or more of their children age 5-17 years have been diagnosed with a mental health condition. Mental health diagnoses included attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD/ADD), behavioral problems, autism, depression, alcohol and drug use, bipolar disorder, and eating disorders. The three most common mental health diagnoses for children age 5-17 years were ADHD/ADD, behavioral problems and depression.

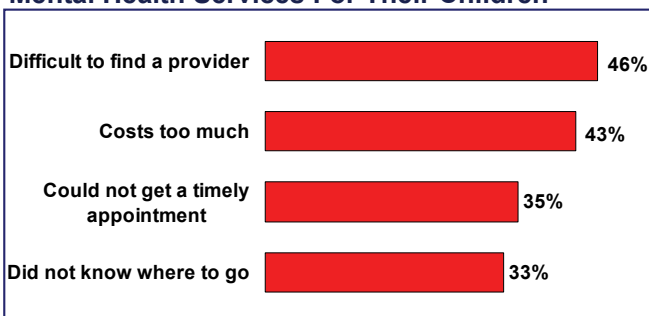
## Difficulties Getting Specialty Mental Health Services

Parents were asked if there has been a time when they could not get specialty mental health services that they wanted for their children. Overall, 7% of parents say there has been a time when they could not get the specialty mental health services they wanted.

Among parents who have a child that has been diagnosed with a mental health condition, 25% have experienced a time when they could not get the specialty mental health services they wanted. In contrast, among parents who *do not* have a child with a diagnosed mental health condition, 3% indicated there was a time when they could not get the mental health services they wanted.

For those parents who say there has been a time when they could not get the mental health services they wanted for their children, nearly one-half said the reasons were that it was difficult to find a provider or that it costs too much, and about one-third said they could not get an appointment in a timely fashion or did not know where to go for specialty mental health services (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Reasons Parents Could Not Get Specialty Mental Health Services For Their Children**



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2008

Insurance coverage was also a concern for some parents. Overall, only 45% of parents report having full coverage for mental health services, 20% have limited coverage, 8% do not have any coverage and 27% of parents were unsure about mental health coverage.

## Implications

According to national estimates, one in ten children and adolescents in the United States suffer from a serious emotional disturbance. And other studies, including this poll, show that at least one out every five children have mental health disorders. Children and adolescents with mental health concerns should get help from health care providers as soon as possible.

With such a high prevalence of mental health concerns, it is concerning that about one-half of families report that their children's primary care physicians do not ask about mental health issues during office visits. It appears that primary health care providers may be missing opportunities to identify children and adolescents with mental health problems and to help parents understand treatment options.

Not surprisingly, a substantial proportion of parents of children with mental health concerns in this poll reported that they have had difficulty accessing specialty mental health care for their children. The shortage of specialty providers is a known problem in the United States, but parents also reported trouble with the costs of care and insurance coverage. Such challenges underscore the importance of primary care in addressing mental health issues for youth.

### Data Source

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Knowledge Networks, Inc, for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered from August 1-31 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults aged 18 and older (n=2,245) with and without children from the Knowledge Networks standing panel that closely resembles the U.S. population. For this analysis, a subset of parents with children age 5-17 years was used (n=1,473). The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 62% among panel members contacted to participate. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2 to 11 percentage points, depending on the question.

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