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Promoting Cultural Humility in Mental Health: A Pediatric Case Study

Background: Latinx children are at increased risk for poverty, trauma, and discrimination, which may lead to behavioral health problems. However, these children often experience greater disparities in health care than their White counterparts. Their guardians' limited English proficiency and a shortage of bilingual and bicultural mental health providers increases barriers. As a result, these patients' mental health disorders are often left underdiagnosed and insufficiently treated.

Case Presentation: An 8-year-old bilingual Latinx male presented for psychiatric evaluation after exhibiting disruption and hyperactivity at home and school. He had engaged in cruelty towards animals and his siblings, property destruction, and self-harm. Interviewing revealed he was having nightmares related to witnessing domestic abuse. He was diagnosed with ADHD and PTSD and started on a medication regimen and referred for trauma-informed therapy. Over six months, disruptive mood dysregulation and conduct disorder were added to his diagnoses. He had not started therapy because multiple therapists were unable to engage him due to their limited Spanish proficiency. A therapy referral was then placed through a local Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) that focuses on Spanish-speaking communities.

Results: Over the following year, the patient's symptoms markedly improved. Therapy sessions with a Spanish-speaking psychologist helped him process his trauma. He has shown progress at school and improved sleep hygiene and has stopped displaying aggression towards others.

Conclusion: Our case illustrates the importance of adopting a framework of cultural humility in behavioral health delivery. To effectively manage a pediatric patient with complex psychiatric diagnoses, it is helpful to incorporate a multidisciplinary approach. The combination of medications specific to the underlying diagnoses and therapy may have advantages over medication alone. Additionally, care delivered in the guardian's primary spoken language by someone whom the patient culturally identifies with has been shown to increase patient engagement.