

Improving access to psychosocial interventions in Washington state:

Introduction to the Behavioral Health Support Specialist (BHSS)



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Disclosures

UW Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences received a generous gift from Ballmer Group for the BHSS Workforce Development Project.

The presenters have no financial conflicts of interest.

Learning Objectives



LO 1 Explain problem and solution development related to introduction of the BHSS

LO 2 List key elements of the BHSS curriculum including examples of evidence based treatment.

LO 3 Discuss purpose of practicum and DOH rules for practicum.

LO 4 Gain knowledge of DOH processes related to program approval, credentialing processes, and oversight.

LO 5 Introduce HCA policy for BHSS service billing and payment.

LO 6 Review strategies for research and evaluation of new provider type.

LO 1

Introduction

- Overview of Problem
- Vision for BHSS
- Solution Development
- Overview of progress and Future Planning

What are the perceived facilitators and barriers to inclusion of the BHSS in your practice, organization, or local community?

Visit <https://bhss-wa.psychiatry.uw.edu/> to view examples of resources referenced in this presentation.

Overview of Problem



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
WORKFORCE SHORTAGE



NEED FOR FULL RANGE
OF TREATMENTS



NEED FOR INCREASED
ACCESS TO CARE FOR ALL

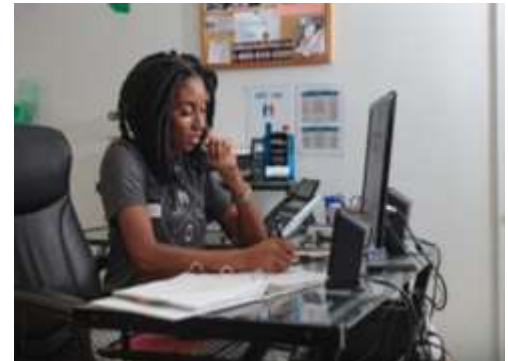
Behavioral Health Support Specialist



Expand career options for bachelor's degree



Vision for BHSS Workforce Development Project



Proposed Solution



Solution Development

- **SSB 5189**
 - Established BHSS as a new WA provider type
- **UW Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences**
 - Leading BHSS Clinical Training Program development
- **Higher Education Partners**
 - Deliver BHSS Curriculum
- **Behavioral Health Community Partners**
 - Host BHSS Practicum/Internships
- **Department of Health and Health Care Authority**
 - Oversee BHSS credential & modify State plan to include BHSS



Progress and Future Planning

Phase 1: 2021-2025

- Developed BHSS competency framework
- Consulted industry partners
- Created a curriculum map
- Completed BHSS Implementation Guide
- Implemented the Intelligent Tutoring System (ITS)
- Advocated for credentialing
- Completing Educator's Guide
- Delivering training and education on BHSS role
- Developing supervisor training
- Mapping competencies for adolescent clinical care to adult curriculum

Phase 2: 2025-2030

- Implement clinical supervisor training and consultation
- Expand education partner relationships
- Support integration of curriculum into new and existing education partner programs
- Offer curriculum addendum for adolescents and young adults
- Consult on BHSS integration into the workplace
- Support policy revision and development to optimize BHSS role
- Evaluate impact of BHSS on access to care, workforce expansion, and other salient variables

LO 2

BHSS Curriculum

- Competency Framework
- BHSS Implementation Guide
- BHSS Educator's Guide
- Intelligent Tutoring System

Competency Domains



1. Health Equity
2. Helping Relationships
3. Cultural Responsiveness
4. Team-Based Care and Collaboration
5. Screening and Assessment
6. Care Planning and Care Coordination
7. Brief Evidence-Based Interventions for Common BH Conditions
8. Law, Ethics & Professional Practice

Care Planning and Care Coordination



Whole Person Health

- Knowledge and understanding of the relationship between physical and mental health.
- Skill in building whole health care plans.
- Collaborating with clients and patients on progress, barriers, and modifications.

Screening & Assessment

AUDIT
PHQ-9
C-SSRS PHQ-2
GAD-7

Psychosocial Interventions

Foundations for brief interventions

- Motivational Interviewing
- Psychoeducation

Manage acute crises and substance use concerns

- Distress tolerance and problem solving
- SBIRT
- Counseling strategies from Harm Reduction Treatment (HaRT)

Brief treatment for depression and anxiety

- Behavioral Activation
- CBT for Anxiety
- Difference between brief interventions and long term psychotherapy

Legal, ethical and professional issues



Knowledge of
laws

Ethical decision-
making

Risk reduction
strategies

Ethical principles and guild
based ethics

Reflective
practice

Values exploration

Intelligent Tutoring System (ITS)

Patrick Raue, PhD

Relationship Skills	Session Organization Skills	Interventions	Suicide Screening, Assessment, and Management
Empathy	Agenda Setting	Enhancing Motivation	Assessing suicide risk
Reflection	Symptom Review	Assigning Homework	Managing mild-moderate suicide risk
Cultural Responsiveness	Redirection	Reviewing Homework	Managing moderate-severe suicide risk



ITS Varied Problem Types

Case details & scenario

Progress bar shows how far until skill "Empathy" is completed

Question

Juan is a 42 year-old-man who is unmarried and does not have children. His doctor recommended that he see you after a work-related injury and some help adjusting back to his daily activities.

He tells you: "I've been frustrated and upset lately. I feel achy and I'm in pain much of the day. It's hard for me just to get out of bed in the morning."

You could respond in the following ways. Choose **all** statements that demonstrate empathy

☐ That sounds hard -- I bet it hurts a lot!

☒ I bet you will start feeling better in no time if you just listen to your doctor.

☐ You just have to think about how lucky you are that the injury wasn't worse.

Submit

Feedback and a second chance

Not quite. One or more of your selections are incorrect.

Problems of this type are looking for traits like:

- helps name or describe the client's emotional experience
- communicates concern for the client's feeling or experiences
- expresses that a client's emotions or experiences are normal, expected, or understandable
- communicates that you understand the client's feelings

Try Again

☒ I bet you will start feeling better in no time if you just listen to your doctor.

☐ You just have to think about how lucky you are that the injury wasn't worse.

Submit

LO 3

Practicum

- Practicum timing in degree program
- Practicum requirements

BHSS curriculum integration

BS, BA or BAS program

Years 1 & 2

General
Education

Year 3

Degree
Specific
Content

BHSS
Foundations

Year 4

BHSS
Advanced

Practicum or
Internship
with
Seminars

*Competencies Introduced, Reinforced,
and Assessed as Proficient*

Practicum Requirements



- Supervised experience with opportunity to engage in screening, contribute to assessment information, participate in care management, care coordination, and deliver or co-deliver psychosocial interventions with a defined population
- Evaluate level of proficiency with BHSS competency domains
- Mediating variable is continued supervision in the workplace

Mid presentation check in



LO 4

Department of Health

- BHSS Program Approval
- BHSS Credentialing
- Regulatory oversight

Department Of Health



- BHSS Education Program Approval
 - Curriculum
 - Can be part of a BA or postgraduate program
 - Practicum
 - Variety of settings, appropriate supervision required
- BHSS Certification Process
 - Education (BA degree + BHSS program)
 - Experience (practicum supervision)
 - Examination (jurisprudence exam)

BHSS Practicum Supervision



Supervisors must meet with a BHSS student to:

- Plan clinical skill development, including gradual participation in facilitating clinical encounters;
- Set goals and expectations for the duration of the practicum;
- Establish a schedule for supervision; and
- Identify an alternate supervisor in case the primary supervisor is unavailable

Practicum Requirements:

- At least 240 hours over 5 months;
- At least 12 hours of individual or triadic supervision;
- At least 60 hours of direct client contact, including co-delivery of services with a supervisor or other certified or licensed behavioral health provider;
- Demonstrate at least one clinical skill from each competency domain

Eligible Supervisors



- LICSW/A
- LMFT/A
- LMHC/A
- Psychiatric ARNP
- Psychologist
- Other licensed provider who is competent to assess, diagnose, and treat behavioral health conditions
- Osteopathic Physician
- Physician
- LASW/A

BHSS Scope of Practice



- A BHSS provides ‘brief, evidence-based interventions’ to individuals with behavioral health conditions. Treatments are adjusted based on patient responses to find the most effective treatment and continue based on patient need and consultation with a clinical supervisor.
- Interventions may occur based on the diagnosis of another provider, or may occur prior to diagnosis from another provider, based on patient screening.
- A BHSS cannot assess or diagnose individuals with a behavioral health condition.

Continuing Education



- A certified BHSS must complete 20 hours of Continuing Education every 2 years, either in person or through distance learning, including:
 - At least 3 hours in suicide assessment (every six years)
 - At least 2 hours in health equity (every four years)
 - At least 3 hours in law and ethics (every two years)

BHSS Fees

- Application and renewal fees are currently set at \$285.
- The fee study determined this amount based on anticipated applicants for the credential.



LO 5

Health Care Authority

- Billing codes
- State plan
- Taxonomy
- BH and Medical

LO 6

Evaluation



*Implement methods of **evaluation** to engage in continuous program improvement*

- Understand student population
- Explore curricular integration
- Barriers and facilitators to employment
- Impact on workforce and quality of care



Participate in Study of Employers

- Understanding Barriers and Facilitators to Organizational Uptake of the new Behavioral Health Support Specialist (BHSS) role in Washington State
- (UW IRB: STUDY00020367)
- \$25 Tango Gift Card for participating
- Alix Rose, PhD
 - T32 Psychology Research Fellow, UW



Summary

- Challenges
- Progress
- Current Study
- Contact Information
- Questions

Summary of Challenges



- Balancing work of curriculum development with policy development.
- Curricular integration takes time.
- Shortage of practicum supervisors .
- Supporting employers with integration of BHSS into existing workflows.

Summary of Progress

- Elements of BHSS competency framework match the list of skills identified by behavioral health employers in the 2024 Sentinel Network workforce survey.
- 10 colleges and universities are in the process of applying for program approval across the state, including schools serving rural communities.
- Practicum sites are training BHSS's this year.
- There will be approximately 40-50 students eligible this summer for the new credential.

Contact Information

- UW BHSS Clinical Training Program
 - Email: bhsswa@uw.edu
 - [Sign up](#) for quarterly newsletter
 - University of Washington [website](#)
- Department of Health BHSS Website
 - DOH Program Staff: BHSS@doh.wa.gov
 - Sign up for [GovDelivery](#) for updates
 - DOH [website](#)

QUESTIONS?



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