

THE CHRISTIAN MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE: A PILOT TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN FAITH AND MENTAL HEALTH

Atasha Jordan, MD, MBA
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA

Background: According to the Pew Research Center, approximately 71% of Americans identify as Christian. In church communities, unfamiliarity with mental health topics seemingly leads to the conflation of spiritual and mental health. Many Christian patients seek counsel from church leaders rather than mental health clinicians in times of psychological distress. Church leaders are often trained in seminary to support their members' spiritual development; however, seminary programs that include mental health training are in the minority.

Objectives: Psychiatrists can play an integral role in bridging the gap in psychiatric care for Christians through collaboration with church leaders. To this end, the Christian Mental Health Initiative (CMHI) pilot aims to foster collaboration between church leaders and psychiatrists by providing church leaders a framework to better recognize church members' mental health challenges. Second, the pilot aims to inform church leaders how to appropriately refer their congregants to mental health providers.

Methods: The CMHI pilot will take place at a Protestant church in Philadelphia, PA. Twelve church leaders will participate in a 1.5-hour seminar titled A Mental Health Overview for Church Leaders. The researchers adapted the American Psychiatric Association's resource Mental Health: A Guide for Faith Leaders to create the presentation materials. Attendees will complete pre- and post-session surveys to assess their knowledge of mental illnesses and their willingness to refer church members to mental health resources.

Results: The researchers hypothesize that church leaders will report increased knowledge of mental illness and an increased willingness to refer church members to mental health resources.

Discussion: In collaboration with church leaders, psychiatrists can support their Christian patients' mental health through low-effort initiatives like workshops and seminars. Educating church leaders on mental illness and local mental health resources may, in turn, increase the utilization of mental health services amongst Christians with mental illness.

Full List of Authors
Atasha A. Jordan, MD, MBA

Learning Objectives
At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Participants will be able to identify that church leaders play a frontline role in addressing the psychological needs of Christians with mental illnesses.
2. Participants will be able to recognize ways in which psychiatrists can help church leaders meet the mental health needs of their congregations.

References

Mental Health: A Guide for Faith Leaders. Washington: American Psychiatric Association Foundation, 2018.

Wang, P, et al. Patterns and Correlates of Contacting Clergy for Mental Disorders in the United States. *Health Serv Res.* 2003 Apr;38(2):647-73.