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# NSU-COM      Medical      Family Therapy      Clinic      Augments Patient Care

 Providing patients with the most effective care possible has been a longstanding goal of the medical clinics at Nova Southeastern University's College of Osteopathic Medicine (NSU-COM). Thanks to a collaboration between NSU-COM and the Department of Family Therapy at NSU's College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (CAHSS), patients are benefitting from a clinical partnership that combines biological and biopsychosocial care.

In 2016, the Medical Family Therapy Clinic at the College of Osteopathic Medicine began providing free supplemental services to patients at the NSU-COM medical clinics. According to Arlene Brett Gordon, Ph.D., LMFT, director of the CAHSS's Brief Therapy Institute, the medical family therapy team consists of six advanced doctoral student-therapists who have completed their clinical internship at NSU's Family Therapy Clinic at the Brief Therapy Institute. Each therapist has years of experience working directly with individuals, couples, and families who are struggling to cope with life's challenges.

The medical family therapy team offers patients a multi-tiered approach that includes therapy, education, and advocacy. "As clinicians, we offer systemic therapeutic assistance to patients, their support systems, and members of their medical team," Gordon explained. "Our services also include patient education based on individual and/or family need. For example, if a patient is living with hypertension, we would explore new coping strategies to address stress. If someone is living with anxiety, mindfulness training and meditation practices might be beneficial."

Because multifaceted communication is integral to a patient's overarching health, the clinic team works closely with a patient to engage and facilitate conversations between the patient's family and affiliated health care providers. "As systemic therapists, we help incorporate a patient's family into the health and healing process, as well as help find resources for patients and their families that go beyond the treatment room," Gordon said. "We also make referrals to appropriate community services."

The mind-body-spirit methodology that epitomizes osteopathic medicine makes the Medical Family Therapy Clinic collaboration a natural extension of NSU-COM's existing patient care services. As research has shown, life stressors, such as relationship issues, financial setbacks, and job loss, can have serious implications on the human body. Consequently, therapeutic interventions that address stress reduction and introduce key coping strategies support the patients'

potential for making healthy change.

“Our goal is to be available on-site for COM physicians, residents, students, patients, family members, and their support systems,” Gordon said. “Referrals are addressed immediately or in a timely manner. If we are not busy seeing a patient, we are available to meet with patients during their medical visit or accept physician referrals to contact patients to schedule appointments.”

As is the case with other NSU health care clinics, the Medical Family Therapy Clinic’s primary goal is providing compassionate and effective patient care. A secondary, but equally important, clinic objective involves serving as a fertile learning environment for attending physicians, residents, and medical students. Training opportunities are scheduled on an ongoing basis via live presentations, which are designed to provide medical team members a chance to learn about medical family therapy and to explore the medical implications through systemic collaboration.

“Medical family therapists, working side-by-side with physicians in this integrative model of care, invite a more systemic approach to patient care, Gordon said. “Working with systemic family therapists is a wonderful opportunity for members of NSU-COM’s medical teams to explore ways to incorporate systemic thinking into their work with patients and their families.”

In certain situations, members of the medical team are invited to attend therapy sessions to benefit the patients’ needs. “For example, when working with pediatric patients, we not only meet with the child, but also the members of family who support that child,” Gordon explained. “We work collaboratively with the family, the medical team, and others to better meet the needs of the child and the family system.”

Thanks to the participation of everyone involved, the Medical Family Therapy Clinic has become a successful complement to the services provided by NSU-COM’s medical clinics.

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