

## Supporting Mental Health in Puerto Rico Post-Maria

With focus on screening and care transitions regarding mental health conditions among beneficiaries, TMF Health Quality Institute has partnered with the Arkansas Foundation for Medical Care, Primaris in Missouri and Ponce Medical School Foundation in Puerto Rico to form the TMF Quality Innovation Network Quality Improvement Organization (QIN-QIO), under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. As a collaborative effort, the TMF QIN-QIO has organized a community coalition of primary care physicians, inpatient psychiatric facilities, hospitals, additional medical providers, partners and other stakeholders throughout Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico and Texas, under a Behavioral Health Network. This network aims to increase the screening rates for depression and alcohol use disorder in primary care settings, reduce the 30-day readmission rate and increase follow-up care for patients discharged from inpatient facilities. As part of this Behavioral Health Network, Ponce Medical School Foundation has brought key mental health issues facing the Puerto Rico community to the forefront, particularly post-Hurricane Maria.

### **The TMF QIN-QIO team in Puerto Rico hosts a seminar for providers: *A Stress-Relief Evening: Caring for the Behavioral Health of Health Care Providers***

Mental health has been a pervasive issue in Puerto Rico even before Hurricane Maria. One year after the hurricane, Puerto Rico is facing a mental health crisis, with suicide rates up nearly 30 percent from 2016. While reports of suicide and mental health continue to increase, the shortage of medical personnel on the island adds to the complexity of this crisis. With fewer doctors and behavioral health professionals to address mental health, Puerto Rico's medical care professionals face the challenge of burnout and caregiver fatigue at staggering rates.



**Providers learn about burnout and self-care at the TMF QIN-QIO's first stress-relieving event.**

In October 2018, the TMF QIN-QIO in Puerto Rico presented the first provider-focused stress relief seminar. Grace Viñas Joy, PhD, a clinical psychologist of Ponce Health Sciences University, presented on various topics, including self-evaluation, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, burnout and self-care exercises and practices. With nearly 50 providers and medical care staff in attendance, the TMF QIN-QIO got to hear about the overwhelming patient load and high level of mental health trauma facing Puerto Rico's patient population. Throughout the evening, participants shared their stories with their peers and practiced stress-relieving techniques and coping skills to help better care for themselves while caring for their patients. With the overwhelming participant engagement in the session and thirst for knowledge, the need for this type of provider outreach was evident. After the session, Spanish behavioral health educational materials, available to all participating providers in the Behavioral Health Network, were offered to providers. All of these materials were taken by

the end of the evening with rapid re-order in route to the island. The team in Puerto Rico will continue to serve as a behavioral health support system for providers in not only their role of caring for patients with mental health needs but in their own self-care to lessen burnout and improve stress management.

**For more information about the TMF QIN-QIO's Behavioral Health project, please contact Caitlin Moore, MPH, CPHQ, Project Director, at [behavioralhealth@tmf.org](mailto:behavioralhealth@tmf.org).**