

A 'check up from the neck up'—mental health screening kiosks

January 8 2015, by Frank Otto



Kiosks like the those set to be installed at two Drexel buildings to screen for mental health issues in use.

During their time in college, most students learn the importance of looking out for their own health.

However, some miss the connection that their mental well-being is just as important as keeping a regular exercise regimen or eating the right

diet.

"We manage to meet the needs of the students coming in to receive care from us, but there are lots and lots of students out there who don't ever make it in to see us," said Annette J. Molyneux, PhD, associate dean for the Office of Counseling and Health. "Those are the students we need to reach out to."

Keying off of that, Drexel counseling services hopes to reach more students in need with the installation of a new [mental health](#) screening kiosk for students at the Drexel Recreation Center next month.

Through a partnership with the Scattergood Foundation, a philanthropic non-profit focusing on [behavioral health](#), Drexel will actually receive two different kiosks; the one scheduled for the Recreation Center will focus on students, and another will be placed at the Stephen and Sandra Sheller 11th St. Family Health Services Center to focus on patients and the community.

"I am excited about it," said Patricia Gerrity, associate dean for community programs at the College of Nursing and Health Professions and director of 11th Street Family Health Services. "This is a pilot program that will help us reach an underserved population and help guide people to needed services. I think it's going to have some good results and we're going to learn from it."

Drexel was chosen as the first university in the country to use the kiosk system. Although it will begin with the two kiosks promised by the foundation, the hope is to add more to Drexel's campuses. An Indiegogo campaign with the goal of raising \$25,000 by Jan. 16 was developed for that purpose.

Featuring an angled, touch-screen, tablet-type device mounted atop a

thin podium, the kiosks are produced by Screening for Mental Health Inc. One is already in use at a ShopRite's pharmacy in North Philadelphia.

Paul Furtaw, associate director of counseling services, likened the kiosks to the blood pressure measuring machines seen at the back of drug stores.

"You don't need to be a licensed clinician," he said. "You can just be a lay person finding out about yourself."

The kiosks support screening for six different mental health issues: Anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, substance abuse or eating disorders. All of the screenings are available online.



The kiosks will be used to screen for issues including bipolar disorder, post-traumatic disorder and depression.

Each screening just requires a person to answer 10 to 15 basic questions. Anyone using the kiosk does so anonymously with just a few pieces of information requested, including gender and age, according to Furtaw.

"After they finish, they get feedback as to whether they meet a clinical threshold, whether their presentation of symptoms is significant enough to warrant consulting a mental health professional," Furtaw said.

A page detailing the options available on the national, local and school level will close the screening. The options laid out on Drexel's level, for example, include information about the University's counseling services.

Furtaw feels the process arms the screened individual with a better understanding of his or her mental health.

"It puts them in the driver's seat because they have a range of ways they can seek information and specific professional assistance," Furtaw said.

"You can't solve the problem if you can't articulate the problem," Molyneux said. "A lot of students come in who just don't feel right. They may not know what the source is or understand why. Being able to identify the problem is an important first step in getting the right kind of help to feel better."

Using a kiosk in a space like the Recreation Center is important because it raises awareness. It "mainstreams mental health," as Furtaw put it.

"Having it in the Recreation Center, where people are to feel holistically better, it matters how your head feels," he added.

The kiosk at 11th Street will be placed in the newly expanded dental area

and will help integrate oral health and the Center's behavioral health programs, according to Gerrity. She also subscribes to the holistic belief of mental health.

"It's part of not separating the head, the heart and the mind," she said.

A huge obstacle in treating mental health, especially in doing preventive treatment, is the stigma attached to it.

Although Furtaw said studies have shown that students are more likely to be accepting of [mental health issues](#) with their peers, it's harder for them to accept their own and seek treatment.

Molyneux acknowledged the difficulty of the balance between accessibility and privacy when it comes to the kiosks and mental health care.

"You want it to be private, but you don't want it to be a secret because that's reinforcing the stigma around mental health care," she said. "This is important."

In case a person felt uncomfortable doing the screening in a public place like the Recreation Center, the link to the surveys is available through Counseling and Health Services' website and can be done at home.

No matter the method, the overarching concept is to expand [mental health care](#) and reach those who wouldn't normally seek help.

"Putting the kiosks in people's hands extends the whole notion of accessibility," Furtaw said. "A term Screening for Mental Health developed was, 'A check-up from the neck up.'"

Provided by Drexel University

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