Less than half of youth with mental illness received adequate follow-up care, study finds

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Youth with mental illness are among the most vulnerable, but new research from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) has found that less than half of Ontario youth aged 15 to 19 hospitalized with a psychiatric diagnosis received follow-up care with a primary care doctor or psychiatrist within a month after being discharged.

"Timely aftercare is crucial in maintaining the health of youth with mental illness, and avoids future hospitalization, which is the most intensive, intrusive and expensive psychiatric treatment setting," said Dr. Corine Carlisle, Clinical Head of CAMH's Youth Addiction and Concurrent Disorders Service. "What is concerning is that some of those most in need are not receiving follow-up, including youth with lower socioeconomic status and those who have been diagnosed with more than one mental illness."

Dr. Carlisle and her team studied the health records of more than 7,000 adolescents in Ontario discharged between 2002-2004, and found gaps in follow-up care which seemed to be linked to demographics and diagnoses. The study was published in the November 2012 issue of the *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*.

The research found that adolescents who did not receive follow-up care were more likely to be from Northern Ontario (2 per cent), female (57 per cent), live in rural areas (18 per cent), suffer from a mood disorder (37 per cent) and have exhibited self-harm or suicidality (12 per cent).

"There are only one-tenth the child psychiatrists in Ontario needed to meet the needs of youth with severe mental illness," added Dr. Carlisle. "Clinical and policy efforts are needed to redress the socioeconomic and geographic disparities and improve timely access to mental health aftercare for all youth."

Rob Moore, Executive Director of CAMH's Provincial System Support Program, points out that these efforts are already underway. CAMH is creating 'service collaboratives' across Ontario to try to close some of the gaps in mental health services for children and youth. This is part of Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, which is focusing its first investment in improving the mental health of young people. "The research study being released today shows that our efforts are needed and that we are on the right track," said Moore.

Provided by Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

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