

Healthy Practices

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The Value of Project TEACH

A New York State Program in Support of PCPs, Children, and Families

Dr. Michael Scharf is a local leader in the Rochester area for Project TEACH, a New York State Office of Mental Health (NYS OMH) program providing education and clinical consultation to New York State primary care physicians as they care for the mental health needs of children. MVP spoke with Dr. Scharf to find out how the program can be maximized by providers.

Dr. Scharf, can you give an overview of Project TEACH, and what services are provided?

Project TEACH is a NYS OMH program which provides consultation and education to pediatric providers to improve the health care of their patients. The goal of the program is to provide support, education, and empowerment to providers.

Can you expand on “provide support, education, and empowerment to providers”?

If a provider calls Project TEACH, they can:

- Ask a specific question or present a case, and a Project TEACH child and adolescent psychiatrist will answer their specific questions or provide phone consultation as to an approach to manage a case where the issues are mild to moderate.
- Get appropriate support from Project TEACH child and adolescent psychiatrists when there are long wait times for community referrals.
- Request a linkage/referral to accessible community resources by talking to a Project TEACH liaison coordinator. A primary function of Project TEACH is to help find appropriate and accessible community mental health referrals and linkages for patients and families.
- Receive a referral from a Project TEACH child and adolescent psychiatrist for urgent care to an appropriate emergency and/or other community service.

What kind of education does Project TEACH offer?

Project TEACH educates providers how to manage the most common mental health issues they are likely to see in their practice—mild-to-moderate depression, anxiety, aggression, and ADHD. Project TEACH also offers several free, interactive trainings online, and local trainings within the regions, including free CME courses. Providers can learn more at projectteachny.org/live-training/cme-certified-education.



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How much does it cost to utilize the resources?

The program is fully supported by NYS OMH and there is no cost to providers, parents, or families.

What age group does it cover?

Any age covered by a pediatric practice. The goal is to help pediatric providers practice effectively within the scope of practice they already have.

What resources are available on your projectteachny.org?

Projectteachny.org gives anyone instant access to provider resources as well as information for parents and families. Providers can find an evidence-based rating scale and checklists that are organized by condition. The goal is to build a culture in which providers are using the same rating scale, so that we become in sync when assessing patients.

What can providers expect when they call for assistance?

When you contact Project TEACH, you will speak with a liaison coordinator, who will take the information, and may be able to answer questions or make referrals for patients living in NYS. If that is not the case, they will connect you within two hours with a clinician that can best serve your needs. We can also identify local NYS providers that have walk-in clinics for therapy. We are not here to pressure, but to enhance the effectiveness of treatment.

Is there a limit to the number of calls for consultation that providers can make?

No. The provider can contact us as often as needed. Some providers call every week to run through their cases. As they become more comfortable, they tend to call less frequently. It's completely up to them.

When it comes to child behavior, how do we sort out what is normal given the pandemic, versus when there is concern of a disorder?

Regardless of the pandemic, any behaviors that interfere with a child's daily living or leads to functional impairment needs to be addressed. The rating scales are helpful if you know the symptom area and can help give a general impression for how the child is doing. If the primary care provider is unsure of what to do, we can help them figure out the next steps. If it is necessary to talk to a psychiatrist, we can schedule a consultation that fits the provider's schedule. We also offer a consultation if medication is recommended for the patient.

What about the newer service for maternal health providers?

Expanding the scope to include maternal mental health resources has been a great step for us. Project TEACH now provides consultations, linkage and referrals, and resources to help combat maternal depression and related mood and anxiety disorders. If we can help to identify and treat these conditions early, it can lead to better health outcomes for mothers and children. You can request a consultation with a Project TEACH expert psychiatrist in maternal mental health during consultation phone hours every Tuesday from 5–6 pm and every Thursday from 1–2 pm.

What is the most important thing you'd like to share with your colleagues regarding Project TEACH?

To my fellow colleagues, I want them to know that we are here for them. For most of us, we are already facing a crisis. Currently 40% of pediatric cases are focusing on behavioral health, and it's likely to get worse. Our case level consultations can make you more effective in the treatment of your patients. Always feel free to contact us for support, there is never a wrong phone call for guidance!

About Dr. Michael Scharf In addition to local site leader for Project TEACH, Dr. Scharf is the Director of Psychiatry Graduate Medical Education and Chief of the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Rochester Medical Center.

Learn more at projectteachny.org. Capital Region, North Country, and Mid-Hudson Region **844-892-5070**. Central and Western NY, Southern Tier **855-227-7272** Monday–Thursday 8 am–7 pm and Friday 8 am–5 pm.