

Mental Health Care Starts With A First Step

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ALTON - Tackling any task – from a child walking to an adult learning a new job – starts with a first step. The same goes for taking care of your mental and behavioral health, but even the experts admit it may be daunting to ask for help. In the midst of [Mental Health Awareness Month](#), experts are reminding you there are resources to bridge the gap between “What do I do?” and “I have the care I need.”

Katie Koeller is a [behavioral health navigator](#) (BHN) at OSF HealthCare in [Alton, Illinois](#). BHN is a free, ministry-wide service at OSF HealthCare, but you don’t have to be an OSF HealthCare patient to use it. The program helps people in areas like depression, anxiety, drug or alcohol use, and problems with work, school, or relationships. The BHN talks to the patient – either at a provider’s office or over the

phone – about what care they need, and they point the person to that care as close to home and as soon as possible. The BHN also checks the patient’s insurance coverage to see how it lines up with the care needed.

“We would do an intake,” Koeller explains. “So we'd ask questions, making sure that they're not in a crisis situation at the time and see what their symptoms are. And then that way we can better judge what they would be suited for as far as counseling, psychiatry, substance use treatment, whatever it may be.”

Koeller notes the treatment could be out-patient (the typical office visit) or in-patient (live-in treatment). She says a BHN will also check in with the patient via phone call or message on OSF HealthCare’s [secure online portal](#). Koeller says it’s usually three check-ins over a month, but each case is different.

“Some people just decide maybe it's not what they need, maybe just talking with somebody like me and just getting educated and feeling like they have that opportunity or just the knowledge about the community resources is enough,” Koeller says. “Because then they were like, ‘Well I can decide later on if that's what I need.’ But for the most part, I feel like a lot of patients are appreciative and do really like the service and find it helpful.”

Koeller, a BHN for three years, says even if the patient is on a good path, the BHN tells them they can always call back if they need more help.

The tendency to stay quiet about mental health is still an issue, Koeller says. But she’s seeing another roadblock to care.

“A lot of people just feel like they don't have time for it. I've heard a lot of people say that ‘I can't take off work for it.’” Koeller says. “I feel like a lot of people don't consider it to be . You don't want it to get to that point. So they kind of push it back like it's not as important as my physical health.”

But in reality, Koeller says, mental health does impact physical health. In other words, if your mind hurts, your body may hurt, too.

Koeller also notes that some insurance providers can help with transportation – getting a ride to a counselor appointment, for example. [Telehealth](#) – a digital appointment with a provider from home – is also an option that’s growing in use. [OSF SilverCloud](#) is another resource designed for workplaces. These are some of the many things a BHN can check on and, at a minimum, educate the patient on what’s available.

Patients who are experiencing a mental or behavioral health issue can contact their primary care provider or – if you live within [OSF HealthCare's footprint](#) – use the [behavioral health navigator](#) program. If you're in a crisis situation, call 9-1-1 or the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at 800-273-8255.