

Community mental health doulas (CMHD): a novel approach to addressing mental health challenges in America

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Abstract

Background: Mental health challenges in the United States persist, with significant disparities in access to care and outcomes. The Community Mental Health Doulas (CMHD) model emerges as a novel approach to address these issues by providing community-based, culturally competent support.

Methods: A literature review was conducted, synthesizing research on doula care, community health workers, and mental health interventions published between 2018 and 2024.

Results: The CMHD model shows promise in improving continuity of care, enhancing cultural competence, reducing stigma, and increasing community engagement. Implementation considerations include sustainable funding, ethical boundaries, collaboration with existing providers, and technology use. Challenges include potential resistance from traditional providers and ensuring quality across diverse communities.

Conclusion: The CMHD model represents a transformative approach to addressing mental health challenges. While further research and pilot studies are needed, it holds significant potential to improve outcomes and reduce disparities. Future efforts should focus on evaluating long-term impacts and advocating for integration into mainstream mental health services.

Keywords: Community Mental Health, Doula Support, Cultural Competence, Mental Health Disparities, Integrated Care Model, United States of America

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mental health issues within communities. Drawing from the success of doulas in childbirth and peer support models in mental health, the CMHD model aims to fill existing gaps in mental health care delivery by providing tailored and community-based support to individuals in need [2]. Research on doulas as Community Health Workers has highlighted the potential of combining roles to enhance social support interventions for positive health outcomes [3]. By recognizing doulas as essential providers and integrating them formally into the maternal care system, there is an opportunity to improve the quality and equity of care provided to childbearing women and adolescents [4]. Moreover, studies on the experiences of Black community-based doulas emphasize the importance of considering doulas as integral members of the care team to ensure optimal and equitable birth outcomes, underscoring the need for their inclusion in healthcare settings [5]. The adaptation of the doula model to mental health through the CMHD approach offers a promising avenue to address the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals seeking mental health support [6]. By delineating the role and responsibilities of CMHDs, establishing training requirements, and emphasizing integration with existing mental health services, this model presents a comprehensive framework to enhance continuity of care, cultural competence, community engagement, and cost-effectiveness in mental health support [7]. The potential benefits of the CMHD model extend beyond individual care to encompass broader societal impacts, such as reduced stigma and improved access to mental health services [8]. As the landscape of mental health care continues to evolve, the CMHD model stands out as a progressive and community-centered approach to addressing mental health challenges in America [9]. By exploring the implementation considerations, challenges, and future directions of the CMHD model,

Background

The provision of maternal care in the United States faces significant challenges, with disparities in health outcomes persisting among different demographic groups [1]. In response to these challenges, the concept of Community Mental Health Doulas (CMHD) emerges as a novel approach to addressing

stakeholders can gain insights into the transformative potential of this innovative approach [10]. Through further research, pilot studies, and policy advocacy, the CMHD model holds promise in reshaping mental health care delivery and fostering holistic well-being within communities [11].

The Community Mental Health Doula (CMHD) Model

The CMHD model represents a comprehensive approach to addressing mental health challenges by providing tailored support within communities. This model entails a detailed description of the role and responsibilities of mental health doulas, emphasizing training requirements, core competencies, and seamless integration with existing mental health services to offer holistic support [13]. The incorporation of doulas into mental health care delivery aligns with the success observed in other healthcare settings, such as the role of doulas in providing breastfeeding support during the COVID-19 pandemic, showcasing the potential impact of doulas in enhancing health outcomes [12]. Moreover, research on doulas in various healthcare contexts underscores the need to explore the significant impact doulas may have on advancing evidence-based practices and interprofessional approaches to healthcare [5]. Studies have highlighted the benefits of doula care in improving birth outcomes, reducing cesarean sections, premature deliveries, and labor duration, indicating the potential positive effects of integrating doulas into healthcare systems [14]. Additionally, the experiences of doulas in providing emotional support, physical comfort, and health education during critical periods like childbirth and end-of-life care emphasize the valuable role doulas play in enhancing patient experiences and outcomes [15,16]. The CMHD model's emphasis on community-based support aligns with the broader goal of advancing equity in maternal health and bridging disparities in healthcare delivery [17]. By integrating mental health doulas into existing services and advocating for sustainable funding models, the CMHD model has the potential to address gaps in mental health care access and quality [18,19]. Furthermore, the utilization of virtual doula care platforms has shown promising results in improving birth experiences and reducing the likelihood of cesarean births, highlighting the adaptability and effectiveness of doulas in diverse healthcare settings [5]. The CMHD model represents a transformative approach to mental healthcare delivery, drawing on the success and adaptability of doulas in various healthcare contexts. By leveraging the expertise and support provided by mental health doulas, communities can benefit from enhanced mental health services, reduced stigma, and improved health outcomes. Future research and implementation efforts should focus on further exploring the impact of the CMHD model on mental healthcare delivery and advocating for its integration into mainstream healthcare systems to promote holistic well-being within communities.

Potential Benefits of CMHD

The Community Mental Health Doula (CMHD) model offers various benefits that can significantly enhance mental health care delivery. One key advantage is improved continuity of care, which has been linked to greater patient, provider, and staff satisfaction, reduced resource use and costs, fewer emergency department visits, decreased hospitalizations for patients with chronic illnesses, and improved clinical outcomes [20].

Additionally, the CMHD model aims to enhance cultural competence, aligning with the need for culturally sensitive care to enhance health outcomes and patient experiences [21]. Reducing stigma related to mental health and increasing community engagement are other crucial benefits of the CMHD model. By addressing stigma, the model can help individuals feel more at ease seeking mental health support, thereby improving access to care and overall well-being. Increased community engagement fosters a sense of support and belonging, crucial for mental health recovery and resilience [22]. Moreover, the potential cost-effectiveness of the CMHD model is a significant advantage, as efficient mental health interventions can lead to long-term healthcare cost savings while enhancing patient outcomes [23]. The CMHD model's focus on improving continuity of care, cultural competence, reducing stigma, increasing community engagement, and potential cost-effectiveness highlights its potential to revolutionize mental health services. By incorporating these benefits into mental health care practices, the CMHD model can enhance patient experiences, improve health outcomes, and contribute to the well-being of individuals and communities. Future research and implementation efforts should further explore these benefits and assess the impact of the CMHD model on mental health care delivery.

Implementation Considerations

Implementation considerations are crucial for the successful integration of the CMHD model into mental health care delivery systems. Sustainable financial support is essential for the effective operation of mental health doula programs [24]. Ethical boundaries must be clearly defined to ensure that mental health doulas adhere to professional standards, maintain confidentiality, and respect clients' autonomy [25]. Collaboration between doulas and mental health providers can enhance the quality and continuity of care for individuals seeking mental health support [26]. Utilizing technology for support and monitoring is a vital aspect of implementing the CMHD model effectively. Virtual platforms can extend the reach of mental health doulas, especially in areas where in-person care is limited, thereby increasing access to services and improving work efficiencies [5]. Technology can also facilitate communication and coordination between mental health doulas and other healthcare professionals, enhancing the overall quality of care provided to individuals in need of mental health support [27]. A multidisciplinary team approach can improve interprofessional communication and care coordination, ensuring that mental health doulas collaborate effectively with other healthcare professionals to address the diverse needs of individuals seeking mental health support [28]. By integrating mental health doulas into existing mental health services and establishing clear communication channels, the CMHD model can enhance the overall effectiveness and efficiency of mental health care delivery [29]. Successful implementation of the CMHD model necessitates careful consideration of funding mechanisms, ethical guidelines, integration with mental health professionals, and the strategic use of technology for support and monitoring. By addressing these implementation considerations thoughtfully and systematically, mental health systems can fully leverage the CMHD model to provide holistic and effective support to individuals facing mental health challenges. Future research and

practice should continue to explore and refine the implementation of the CMHD model to optimize mental health care delivery and improve outcomes for individuals and communities in need.

Limitations and Future Directions

CMHD model presents several challenges and limitations that need to be addressed for successful integration. Resistance from traditional mental health providers may arise due to concerns about the role of mental health doulas and potential overlaps with existing services [30]. Ensuring quality and consistency of support is essential to maintain the effectiveness of the CMHD model and build trust with clients seeking mental health assistance [31]. Moreover, scaling the model to cater to diverse community needs requires strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and the development of tailored approaches to address varying mental health requirements across different populations [32]. Future directions for the CMHD model involve a multifaceted approach encompassing pilot studies, research agendas, policy implications, and advocacy efforts to further validate its effectiveness and impact. Pilot studies can provide valuable insights into the practical implementation of the CMHD model, allowing for refinement based on real-world experiences and outcomes [33]. Research agendas should focus on evaluating the long-term effects of the CMHD model on mental health outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and community engagement to inform evidence-based practices and policy decisions [34]. Policy implications stemming from successful pilot implementations can drive systemic changes to support the widespread adoption of the CMHD model within mental health care systems [35]. Advocacy efforts play a crucial role in promoting the benefits of the CMHD model, raising awareness about the importance of community-based mental health support, and advocating for increased funding and resources to sustain and expand mental health doula programs [36]. By engaging with policymakers, healthcare providers, and community stakeholders, advocacy initiatives can drive systemic changes, reduce stigma surrounding mental health care, and foster a supportive environment for the integration of the CMHD model into mainstream mental health services [37]. Overall, future directions for the CMHD model aim to enhance its effectiveness, scalability, and sustainability to address the evolving mental health needs of diverse populations and promote holistic well-being within communities.

Conclusions

CMHD model offers a promising approach to addressing the existing gaps in mental health care delivery in America. To fully realize the potential of this innovative model, further exploration, pilot implementation, and research are essential. By conducting pilot studies, researchers and practitioners can gain valuable insights into the practical application of the CMHD model, allowing for refinement and optimization based on real-world experiences and outcomes [33]. Research agendas should focus on evaluating the long-term impact of the CMHD model on mental health outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and community engagement to inform evidence-based practices and policy decisions [34]. Policy implications stemming from successful pilot implementations can drive systemic changes to support the widespread adoption of the CMHD model within mental health

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Abbreviation

CMHD: Community Mental Health Doulas; COVID-19: Coronavirus Disease 2019

Declaration

I declare that this manuscript is an original work, has not been submitted elsewhere, and that all information contained herein is accurate to the best of my knowledge.

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Authors' contributions

George Akwetey Junior (GAJ) solely conceived, designed, researched, wrote, revised, and approved the final version of the manuscript. The author approved the final version of the manuscript.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This research was conducted following the Declaration of Helsinki. This review paper did not was classified as exempt from Institutional Review because it does not involve human participants or closed data.

Consent for publication

Not applicable

Competing interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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