

KU Wichita psychiatry faculty works at junction of **mental and physical** health

Mental health is often affected by physical health and vice versa. In extreme cases, a patient's mental condition may impede or even defeat medical professionals' attempts to treat physical illness.

When that happens, a consultation-liaison psychiatrist such as **Rachna Kalia, M.D.**, can help. Kalia, associate clinical professor in the Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences at KU School of Medicine-Wichita, evaluates and treats patients at two Ascension Via Christi campuses along with a community outpatient clinic.

"What I love most is the interdisciplinary approach," Kalia said. "Every day brings patients with different challenges and complex medical conditions. It's very fulfilling to be part of a team and to be able to help patients improve."

Kalia said about half the patients she sees have a documented psychiatric history, while she evaluates others for the first time in their lives. She works with attending physicians and other members of the medical teams on nearly every floor of St. Francis and St. Joseph hospitals, from surgical and obstetric units to ICUs, pediatrics and St. Francis' cancer center, in addition to the HealthCore Clinic on east 21st Street.

Psychiatric assessments include interviews with the patient, their medical team and family or caretaker, plus a thorough review of medical records including lab studies, all medications a patient is taking, and head imaging studies in some cases.

"All of that information is synthesized together," Kalia said.

"We come up with, 'Here's what's likely going on with the patient, here's the most likely diagnosis,

these are (other) possibilities and here's what we recommend.' We come up with an individualized treatment plan for every patient."

Assessments usually fall within three areas. One is safety: Does a patient represent a danger to himself or herself or others? These are typically done when a patient has attempted or talked about suicide or otherwise harmed themselves or has been violent or aggressive toward others.

Another is mental capacity: Can a patient make rational decisions regarding his or her care? This might be triggered, for instance, when a patient refuses to undergo an amputation despite life-threatening repercussions.

The third is noncompliance: Why will a patient not follow physicians' recommendations pertaining to diet, smoking, medication or some other behavior?

Treatment generally takes the form of medication changes, providing short-term therapy and/or specific care recommendations for members of the medical team. For instance, Kalia might recommend that an elderly patient who's become confused after developing pneumonia or a urinary tract infection be transferred to a room with a window and not be interrupted by staff during the night, both of which might improve their sleep and help resolve confusion eventually. **Continued on page 2.**



Communicator

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Kalia is accompanied on many hospital rounds by residents and medical students, and second-year psychiatric residents have a two-month rotation with her. At the medical school, she lectures on delirium, treating mental illness in a hospital setting, capacity assessments and related topics.

“That’s another exciting part of my job,” said Kalia, who earned a medical degree in her native India, completed her psychiatry residency at KU Wichita in 2011 and joined the faculty three years later.

“I get medical students interested in all kinds of specialties. I think they find it very cool to see how

psychiatry and mental health will be relevant to their specialty no matter which direction they go after they graduate from medical school.”

At HealthCore Clinic, Kalia works with other providers in a collaborative care model. What she calls the “huge,” if not completely understood, connection between mental and physical health challenges her every day.

“I say we in the medical field have some understanding of how our brain and body is connected but we still have a ways to go.”



Living the mission: Psychiatry resident a true ‘guardian angel’

Article reprinted from the Aug. 23, 2022, issue of “Good for You,”
the Ascension Via Christi newsletter.

From the moment psychiatry resident **Brittni Plato, M.D.**, became involved in caring for a patient who had been in Senior Behavioral Health at Ascension Via Christi St. Joseph for nearly four months, she began looking to help.

“Unfortunately, this patient is very complex due to her diagnosis and behaviors, so finding a medication regimen that works for her has not been easy,” wrote Palliative Care social worker Sarah Smart in nominating Dr. Plato for a Guardian Angel award. Undaunted, Dr. Plato requested a Palliative Care consult, which led to an Ethics consult and feedback from a hospice agency to determine if she is at the end of life.

“Dr. Plato was willing to explore every avenue at her disposal to enhance the patient’s quality of life and care. Every time I talked to Dr. Plato, I could hear the moral distress in her voice. She desperately wanted to find solutions for managing patient’s behaviors and agitation,” Smart wrote. “While this patient is still under our care, I feel more confident knowing Dr. Plato is part of her care team. She is passionate about helping this patient find peace, comfort and quality of life ... I am pleased to work alongside her.”

Smart was pleased to be joined by case managers Kim Wong and Monica Lamers and Kamalakar Surineni, M.D., the patient’s attending psychiatrist, when David Alexander, Via Christi Foundation president, presented Dr. Plato’s award.



CONGRATULATIONS, DR. KREHBIEL!

Trever Krehbiel, M.D., a graduate of the University of Kansas School of Medicine-Wichita Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, was awarded the 2022 VJ Reddy Award in recognition of his dedication and significant contributions to the field of mental health care and for exemplifying Dr. Reddy's commitment to patient-centered, compassionate care and to lifelong learning and professional development at the 43rd Annual Conference for Behavioral Health hosted by the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas on Sept. 16, 2022, in Wichita.



Left to right: William Warnes, M.D., medical director of the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas; Trevor Krehbiel, M.D.; and Kyle Kessler, executive director of the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas.

Volunteer spotlight

Lin Xu, M.D., has volunteered for the Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences since she graduated from the KU residency program in 1999. She takes one medical student per week and teaches him/her while seeing patients at the outpatient clinic at COMCARE.

"I enjoy working with young students, especially those who are interested in psychiatry. I had excellent training from KU Wichita for residency and helping students with their career goals is my way of paying it forward," said Dr. Xu.

"The fact that she works to serve an underserved, impoverished population is impressive enough, but the manner in which she conducts her work is admirable! When she has students, she always takes time to explain and teach and involves them beyond allowing them to shadow," said Claudius Ciecko, MS3.



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Happenings IN PSYCHIATRY

Congratulations to:

Sandhya Mainali, M.D., and her husband, Durlav Manandhar, on the birth of their son, Aum Mainali Manandhar, in October 2022.

Amy Terry, M.D., and her wife, Carla Burford, M.D., on the birth of their son, Lincoln Terry Burford, in October 2022.

The department sponsored a table and had participants in the Suspenders4Hope 5k and 1 Mile Walk on Oct 1, 2022. Suspenders4Hope works to increase awareness, reduce stigma and visibly support mental health in our community.

Congratulations to **Rachna Kalia, M.D.**, on her appointment to the Kansas Medicaid Mental Health Medication Advisory Committee. Dr. Kalia's role will be to represent psychiatrists of the state of Kansas at-large and bring psychiatry's voice concerning the utilization of psychiatric medications to the Medicaid Drug Utilization Review Board.

Lisa Harding, M.D., a graduate of our psychiatry residency program, was a speaker for our Psychiatry Grand Rounds on Aug. 23, 2022.

