



## FORUM SPOTLIGHT SERIES

# Data-Driven Mental Healthcare Integrated Into Whole-Person Care at CareSource

Speakers: Jonas Thom, Vice President, Behavioral Health, CareSource;  
Cassie Pohl, MSN, RN, CCM, Manager, BH Enterprise Clinical Programs, CareSource;  
and Dr. Julia Hoffman, PsyD, Vice President, Clinical Strategy Behavioral Health, Teladoc Health



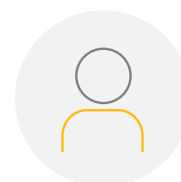
A mission-driven nonprofit, CareSource is one of the nation's largest Medicaid-managed care plans.

Founded in 1989 on the principles of quality and service delivered with compassion, they pride themselves on having a thorough understanding of underserved consumers.

CareSource recently participated in Forum 2021 — an event hosted by Teladoc Health — that brought together a diverse group of healthcare thought leaders, virtual care advocates and innovators from around the globe to share their perspectives on how to advance virtual care. During one of these live event sessions, Jonas Thom, Vice President of Behavioral Health at CareSource, and Cassie Pohl, Manager of Behavioral Health Enterprise Clinical Programs at CareSource, joined Dr. Julia Hoffman, Vice President of Mental Health Strategy at Teladoc Health, to discuss CareSource's shifting approach toward whole-person care. Panelists also discussed the importance of meeting consumer demands for integrated and personalized care interactions, and shared insights from CareSource's journey to deliver on this mission by enabling holistic and patient-centric healthcare.

## Using data to deliver integrated whole-person care

Comorbid conditions, especially with mental health issues, are a major cost driver for health plans. In an analysis of over 200,000 claims, CareSource found that people with diabetes and mental health issues cost 2 to 3 times as much as those with diabetes alone. In fact, 90% of America's \$3.5 trillion annual healthcare costs are spent on people with chronic physical and mental health conditions.



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Costs aside, these staggering numbers underscore the importance of addressing people's care needs through a whole-person lens. That is why CareSource is committed to using data to spot care needs at the intersection of a patient's multiple conditions. "I see the intersection between chronic conditions and mental health as an arm-in-arm situation," shared Pohl. "Within our organization ... we can't become tunnel-visioned in [a member's] care. If we focus only on the diagnosis, we lose valuable information that really impacts their care."

To avoid this, CareSource goes a step beyond the diagnosis and uses motivational interviewing—asking open-ended questions to understand how one condition might be affecting care needs in another. "As professionals, we have to take a step back and see how members are coping. Are they feeling overwhelmed with doing their finger sticks every day? What kind of mood or personality changes are occurring because of [the chronic] illness that is happening?" asked Pohl. This whole-person approach to care allows CareSource to integrate mental healthcare and chronic condition management into intelligent, comprehensive solutions that improve the quality of care offered.

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**Cassie Pohl**, MSN, RN, CCM,  
Manager, BH Enterprise Clinical  
Programs, CareSource





## Investing in technology makes accessing care easier

Many of the underserved populations that make up CareSource's membership face multiple life challenges, said Thom, so if they can access healthcare that's integrated, coordinated, efficient and convenient, then they are much more likely to engage. "Convenience is quality. If someone is able to receive services at an easier level, they're more likely to use those services," added Pohl, "so by doing that, we're really meeting their needs."

Core to this "convenience is quality" model, CareSource has been investing in technology that reaches people on the tools and apps they're already using daily. Some of their recent efforts have focused on leveraging social media. "I'm really proud of our harm-reduction efforts through social media, targeted at our members who use substances for harm-reduction activities," said Thom.

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With a goal of making healthcare convenient, it is easy to see how digital and virtual care solutions that can be accessed through a phone, computer or tablet—and that can integrate well into the virtual ecosystem, which we so readily use in other aspects of our lives—are integral to these efforts. “[We are seeing] more providers using solutions like myStrength from Teladoc Health, and it is giving us the opportunity to really get to people where they are,” added Thom. Moreover, these solutions leverage AI to keep patients engaged. “We’re really using this opportunity to combine the best of all worlds,” said Dr. Hoffman of these solutions. “It’s an opportunity to layer on these incredible AI and machine-learning capabilities to customize that experience in a similar way that I would do as a psychologist if you walked into my clinical office, where I really need to be responding to the person directly in front of me,” she shared.

As CareSource continues to innovate, Thom and Pohl highlighted the importance of partnerships to ensure that these care innovations are trickling down to the most vulnerable members. Toward this goal, CareSource has worked closely with providers, to help them prepare and facilitate their use of any new virtual care resources at their

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**Jonas Thom**, Vice President,  
Behavioral Health, CareSource



disposal. They have also developed strategic partnerships in communities throughout their markets, seeking to facilitate access for their members. One of these initiatives has been teaming up with Goodwill to repurpose physical devices, like computers and cellphones, for members who don't have the means to access these. For areas with no Wi-Fi coverage, CareSource has invested in broadband technology and infrastructure to provide internet access for the entire community, so individuals in these areas can better take advantage of resources available to them.

## Innovations and improvements are paying off

Since the pandemic, CareSource has seen a 22,000% increase in utilization for their virtual health services. "The numbers are really, really striking in terms of telehealth adoption and use, by not just our providers but, importantly, our members," shared Thom.

Additionally, CareSource has seen a reduction in the use of urgent care in ED claims for members with mental health needs. But beyond seeing what is being reduced, they are also monitoring where increases have appeared. Pohl shared that they are encouraged to see increases in mental health therapy appointments, for example, because that means people are actually getting their needs met through proactive interactions using those services, rather than using urgent care or the ED.

Panelists also discussed that many individuals have unmanaged, chronic, co-occurring physical health disorders that they begin to address and understand only once they have engaged in mental health care. "Folks that are in behavioral health care for a while tend to have an overall increase in utilization of outpatient services for physical health [as they] attend to unmet chronic needs. And then over time, we see that flatten out and go down as they attend to all of their needs," added Thom.

All of these improvements in the way care is delivered and managed have been, for CareSource, the result of targeted and focused efforts to innovate the healthcare experience and reconceptualize care through a whole-person lens. "We're really proud of the work we've done, again, through provider partnerships and facilitating access to telehealth and other resources, as well as working in the community to address folks' social needs," said Thom. "We believe all of that work has led to the improving of folks engaging in care, and engaging in care that's coordinated and effective."

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## Actionable takeaways

- 1** Find ways to integrate healthcare into the tools and platforms that consumers are already using in other aspects of their lives.
- 2** Evaluate the intersection between a patient's care needs through a whole-person approach to deliver integrated and comprehensive care solutions.
- 3** Assess barriers that may be hindering use of virtual and digital care resources among your members, and establish community-based partnerships to overcome these.

## Speaker bios



Jonas Thom leads CareSource's behavioral health approach as Vice President of Behavioral Health. Thom has over 30 years of community behavioral health experience as a clinician, policy consultant and senior executive for public health and managed care organizations. He is a respected advocate and collaborative leader committed to improving access to behavioral health treatment for all individuals.

Since joining CareSource in 2010, Thom has led initiatives to address the opioid epidemic through strategies that include decreasing opiate prescribing, increasing both the quality and quantity of substance-use disorder providers within the CareSource network, improving the member experience, and targeting individuals in the criminal justice system. As a direct result of his initiatives, opiate prescriptions for CareSource members have decreased by over 50% and the network of providers has nearly tripled in size. Thom has also been instrumental in the implementation of programs to address the needs of individuals leaving the criminal justice system with the goal of reducing recidivism and improving access to recovery support. These programs and partnerships have supported thousands of CareSource members as they have successfully transitioned from incarceration into the community.

Before his role at CareSource, Thom was the Director at InterAct for Change where he led the development of Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and Intensive Home-based Services certification rules and associated Medicaid policies. There, he worked with more than 100 community behavioral health agencies to implement best practices in care coordination, population health management, and integrating practice fidelity and improvement.

He is a prominent community advocate, holding seats on multiple boards and task forces throughout Ohio. Notable appointments include: Attorney General Opioid Taskforce with Mike DeWine, Chair of Ohio Association of Health Plans', Behavioral Health Committee, Chair of Ohio Coverage and Quality Council's Behavioral Health Workgroup, and Co-Chair of ACT Quality Improvement and Oversight Group. He has been published in the areas of clinical issues and best practices, and has presented on a variety of topics related to behavioral health practices, program development and execution of programs within complex populations at local and national conferences.

Thom continues to hold licenses in Ohio and Kentucky as a Professional Clinical Counselor. He has a Bachelor of Arts in Socio-Psychology from the College of Mount St. Joseph and a Master of Arts in Community Counseling from the University of Cincinnati.

### **Jonas Thom**

Vice President  
Behavioral Health  
CareSource

## Speaker bios



Cassandra Pohl is a psychiatric nurse with over 25 years of experience working with clients and educating those who serve our clients with mental health issues. Having worked through a variety of settings, such as adolescent residential through community mental health, she has found her place with CareSource for the last 13 years. Cassandra believes that education and training can help break through the stigma that continues to be tied to mental health conditions. Through this education, she is able to show others that recovery is possible in mental health and that early detection is the key to obtaining recovery. In addition to working with CareSource, she is a Mental Health First Aid trainer, has trained over 200 participants and has assisted in the training of over 700 people within her organization at CareSource.

**Cassandra Pohl, MSN, RN, CCM**

Manager, Behavioral Health  
Enterprise Clinical Programs  
CareSource



In her current role at Teladoc Health, Dr. Hoffman is responsible for building evidence-based programs that offer a personalized approach to a full spectrum of behavioral health across challenges. Previously, Dr. Hoffman served as national director of mobile health for mental health and suicide prevention at the Department of Veterans Affairs where she oversaw the development of over 40 technology-based behavioral health tools. Dr. Hoffman was featured as one of the Top 25 Emerging Leaders – 2019 in Modern Healthcare.

**Julia Hoffman, PsyD**

Vice President, Clinical  
Strategy Behavioral Health  
Teladoc Health

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**About Teladoc Health:** Teladoc Health is empowering all people everywhere to live healthier lives by transforming the healthcare experience. Recognized as the world leader in whole-person virtual care, Teladoc Health leverages clinical expertise, advanced technology and actionable data insights to meet the evolving needs of consumers and healthcare professionals.

