**Dr. Karen Milner: Introduction**

Welcome to the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health’s learning community for mental health!

The need for identification and treatment of mental health conditions in Wisconsin is supported by compelling data:

* In 2017, almost 20% of adults in Wisconsin struggled with a mental health condition.
* Youth mental health is worsening—in a five-year period, rates of severe youth depression increased from 5.9% to 8.2%.
* Death from suicide averages about 100 people each day nationwide.
* Even though the prevalence of mental illness is similar between rural and urban residents, the services available in rural areas are very different. Issues related to accessibility, availability of treatment and services, and acceptability and stigma that affect all Americans are particular challenges for rural patients.
* One out of 5 adults in Wisconsin report that they are not able to get the treatment that they need whether it be inpatient treatment/counseling, outpatient treatment/counseling, or psychiatric medication. Only a quarter of adolescents with major depression in WI received any mental health treatment.

Compounding these issues is the very serious shortage of mental health providers needed to serve individuals with mental health conditions. In Wisconsin, there is only one mental health provider for every 590 individuals, where the term “mental health provider” includes psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, counselors, and psychiatric nurses combined.

Various strategies have been proposed to address the unmet need.

* Equipping primary care providers with accessible and easy screening tools and encouraging them to screen and ask about mental health problems is imperative in reducing untreated mental illness.
* Peer support specialists, workforce development programs, telehealth or primary care models of integrated care are possible solutions to the significant mental health workforce gap.
* In addition, education and awareness efforts targeted toward rural residents have been used to increase familiarity with mental health issues.

Our goal for this mental health care module is to engage a community of healthcare providers to participate in education and learning about best practices to develop, maintain, and expand mental health services for patients across Wisconsin. We are privileged to have two experts, Dr. Ron Diamond and Dr. David Mays, along with an interprofessional team of faculty will provide content related to screening and integration. Working through the case studies that are associated with each of the presentations will offer participants an opportunity to discuss and share ideas with others and ultimately, serve as a means to promote change and improve patient outcome.

We are delighted that you have joined us. Welcome!