

Behavioral Health

An Interview with John Q. Young, MD, MPP, PhD,
Professor and Chair, Department of Psychiatry, Donald and Barbara Zucker School of Medicine

EDITORS' NOTE Dr. John Q. Young is Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at the Zucker School of Medicine and Senior Vice President and Chair of Behavioral Health at Northwell Health. He is also Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at Zucker Hillside Hospital. Previously, he served as Vice Chair for Education in the Department of Psychiatry at the Zucker School of Medicine and Zucker Hillside Hospital. He also directed the



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Psychiatry Residency Training Program at Zucker Hillside and chaired the Curriculum Committee. Prior to joining Northwell, Dr. Young served as Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the UCSF School of Medicine. He held several roles including Associate Director of the Residency Training Program in the Department of Psychiatry, Director of the Medication Management Clinics at the Langley Porter Psychiatric Hospital and Clinics, and Chair for the Advanced Studies Committee at the School of Medicine. While based at the Kaiser Permanente Oakland Medical Center, he was the Associate Director for the Kaiser-UCSF Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship and a physician investigator with the Behavioral Health Research Initiative at Kaiser's Northern California Division of Research. Dr. Young has held leadership roles in numerous national and international medical education organizations. Prior to his career in medicine, he did human rights work in southern Africa and Asia, community development work in the South, and served as legislative director for an assemblywoman in the California State Legislature where he helped lead several important and high-profile health policy initiatives. He received a BA degree magna cum laude from Harvard University with a double concentration in social studies and the comparative study of religion. He earned a master's degree in public policy from the UC Berkeley Goldman School of Public Policy and a PhD in Health Professional Education from Utrecht University in the Netherlands. He obtained his MD from the University of California at San Francisco School of Medicine, where he also completed residency training in general adult psychiatry.

Will you highlight your role and areas of focus?

I am the Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at the Zucker School of Medicine, Senior Vice President and Chair of Behavioral Health Services at Northwell Health, and Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at Zucker Hillside Hospital. I oversee all of behavioral health at Northwell, including our clinical, educational, and research missions.

Will you discuss the psychiatry program at The Zucker School of Medicine?

We focus on training students how to engage with patients, express empathy, and build alliances – all the key conditions for effective care. For example, our Introductory Clinical Experience (ICE) course places students in small groups where they practice interviewing real patients in the presence of a faculty member and peers, and then give each other feedback. This is a powerful experience for students – to learn from patients who are suffering from serious psychiatric illness. We also have an Advanced Clinical Experience, which is offered in their third year, where every student learns how to diagnose and treat major psychiatric illnesses. Each year, around 10 percent of the graduates go into psychiatry – which is exceptional. As importantly, for those students who are not going to be psychiatrists, they learn how to engage with their future patients many of whom will have a psychiatric illness.

Northwell Health has been a leader in addressing the mental health crisis. What are the keys to driving lasting change in tackling this crisis?

A big part of what excited me about coming to Northwell was our CEO, Michael Dowling, and our COO, Mark Solazzo, who are absolutely committed to addressing the mental health crisis. It is rare for the highest levels of leadership at a health system to make this commitment because the reimbursements from payors for behavioral health services do not cover the costs. While many health systems are trying to minimize their exposure to these losses, we have leadership who are committed to make a difference and treat mental health as a key component of overall health.

Northwell is growing a full continuum of care that will address the mental health crisis in a very meaningful way:

- Digital/Self-Directed care – For those who do not need to see a therapist or psychiatrist but are experiencing stress, sadness, worry, grief or difficulty sleeping, we offer apps with text-based coaching, peer support, and educational resources.

- Integration – We are also embedding behavioral healthcare where people live and work. This includes our school mental health program for children and adolescents, our collaborative care program in medical settings, and our partnerships with faith-based leaders where we train clergy in counseling and embed therapists in churches and mosques to help address mental health for their constituents.

In order to help patients and their families get to the right care in a timely manner, we are building a navigation center which will use digital assessments, AI, and engagement with a clinician to navigate the patient to the right solution which can in turn alter the trajectory of psychiatric illness and literally save lives.

And as the number of children and adolescents in need of mental health support continues to increase at alarming rates, Northwell is investing \$350 million over the next five years to expand pediatric behavioral health services, including creating a new model of care and building a preeminent center of mental health excellence that will bridge the gap between physical and mental health services for children.

Will you discuss how research is an important part of addressing the mental health crisis?

We need to develop better treatments and bring best practices directly to our patients. When we embark on a research endeavor, we make a promise to patients to improve their lives. To help Northwell become a regional leader in depression, we are launching a mood disorders research program. Our department has pioneered new treatments for schizophrenia and first-episode psychosis and literally set the modern standard of care. Our current work in neuroimaging and genetics is identifying biomarkers that will allow earlier identification and treatment of mental illness. Similarly, we are studying how AI can help us analyze a 60 second clip of a person's voice and language to screen for mental illness. ●