



The Massachusetts Psychological Association
2023 Annual Conference

Raising the Next Generation: Innovation to Address the Evolving Needs of Youth and the Profession

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Norwood, MA

Understanding and Addressing the Role of Technology for Youth in Psychiatric Crisis (1.5CE)

Presented by Jennifer Fauci, Ph.D., Megan Ice, Ph.D., Sharmila Mehta, Ph.D., Michael Mullane, Ph.D., ABPP, BCBA-D

Over the last decade, there has been a surging interest in understanding the effects of technology on young people's mental health. In May 2023, the Surgeon General released a public health advisory that focused on "growing concerns about the effects of social media on youth mental health" and included recommendations on how caregivers, families, providers, and youth can respond (Office of the Surgeon General, 2023). Research at the intersection of technology, social media, and youth mental health has been mixed and highly debated (e.g., Odgers & Jensen, 2020; Nesi, 2020). Some research has highlighted serious concerns about the effects on youth mental health (for overview, see Office of the Surgeon General, 2023), especially for girls (e.g. Nesi & Prinstein, 2015); while other research has noted benefits for connection and resource sharing (Anderson & Jiang, 2018), particularly for isolated or socially marginalized youth (Nesi, Wolf, & Hunt, 2019).

As inpatient psychologists, we learn everyday about the ways in which acutely hospitalized youth have utilized technology to cope and how it has shaped or compounded significant social, interpersonal, and psychological consequences in their lives. In the context of the pandemic, when youth became more isolated from school and in-person connection, their immersion in the online world intensified, and accompanying effects became more pronounced. We have seen youth in crisis turn to technology to make desperately wished for friendships, to understand their mental health and suffering, and to channel their hurt and rage. We have also seen this online exploration open up pathways to connection, resources, and learning, as well as heighten vulnerabilities to victimization, misinformation, and harmful content. This has made the task of understanding and addressing the role of technology an integral part of assessment and formulation, individual and family treatment, as well as after-care and safety planning (e.g. Burke et al., 2020; Weinstein et al., 2021)

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will describe recent clinical trends in how technology intersects with mental health for the youth we serve;

- Participants will describe a relational framework for understanding how our patients utilize online worlds to meet key relational and attachment needs;
- Participants will explain our attempts to understand and respond to the role technology plays in youth's mental health by adapting and innovating practices.

Jenny Fauci, PhD is the unit psychologist on the 2N Adolescent Psychiatric Inpatient Service at CHA-Somerville Hospital. In this role, she provides individual, family, and psychological assessment services; offers team and milieu-based clinical consultation; supports unit-wide initiatives focused on improved provision of care; coordinates unit-wide clinical programming through group design, implementation, and teaching; and serves as a supervisor on the psychology team. She completed her psychology internship and post-doctoral fellowship in their Child/Adolescent outpatient and acute services training programs. She completed her PhD in Counseling Psychology at Boston College where her research focused on operationalizing and measuring trauma-informed care in community programs, and understanding where such systems re-create harm, particularly for marginalized women and girls. Before pursuing psychology, she worked in the field of education as a middle school teacher and school leader, and earned an MA in Developmental Psychology from Teachers College. She is committed to providing and improving care for youth in crisis, and, more broadly, in creative prevention and intervention that promotes the mental health of vulnerable young people at the community level.

Sharmila B. Mehta PhD is the Director of Inpatient Child and Adolescent Psychology and Clinical Programming at Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA), overseeing inpatient psychological work and clinical programming needs for the child, adolescent, and neurodevelopmental inpatient units. She is also the director of Child and Adolescent Inpatient Psychology Training at CHA, supervising postdoctoral, internship, and doctoral level child psychology trainees in milieu, individual, family, and group therapy and psychological assessment, and psychiatry trainees in group treatment. Additionally, Dr. Mehta has expertise in assessment of risk of youth violence. She is a national Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) trainer and consultant to school systems and other agencies serving youth. She obtained her Ph.D. in Clinical and School Psychology from the University of Virginia and completed her internship and postdoctoral training at Hartford Hospital-Institute of Living. Dr. Mehta has experience treating youth with acute and chronic mental health issues in inpatient and outpatient settings and is highly invested in patient-centered and trauma-informed inpatient treatment, effective multidisciplinary communication and collaboration, and training developing practitioners with an emphasis on formulation driven treatment and identification of the critical disruptions needed in complex work to improve patient stability. Her other areas of professional interest include educating and supporting parents and providers grappling with children's mental health issues and bringing the inpatient treatment arena into plain and public view through writing.

Megan Ice, PhD works at Cambridge Health Alliance as a clinical psychologist for the child psychiatric inpatient units. Megan earned her doctorate at Long Island University-Brooklyn where her dissertation focused on the relationship between childhood trauma and dissociation. She has worked with children and adolescents with significant trauma histories in a variety of settings, including outpatient, inpatient, schools, and college counseling.

Michael Mullane, PhD, ABPP, BCBA-D is a psychologist, board certified in behavioral and cognitive psychology by the American Board of Professional Psychology, and a board certified behavior analyst at the doctoral level. He currently works on the Neurodevelopmental Disorders Unit at Cambridge Health Alliance and oversees the behavioral assessment and treatment services for the unit, supervises master-level board certified behavior analyst clinicians, as well as oversees the training and supervision for the Registered Behavior Technician® credential. Michael obtained his PhD in School Psychology from Syracuse University and completed his pre-doctoral internship at the University of Nebraska Medical Center's Munroe-Meyer Institute through the Nebraska Internship Consortium in Professional Psychology; He went on to complete a postdoctoral fellowship at the May Institute. His areas of professional and research interest

include applied behavior analysis, broadly, as well as behavioral assessment and treatment for challenging behavior for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities as well as disruptive behavior disorders.