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Title

Reducing Backlog in Behavioral Health Access With Student Interns

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Background

- Context:**
- The Integrated Behavioral Health (IBH) program provides behavioral health services at UCSF Primary Care sites
- Problem:**
- Demand exceeded capacity, delaying patient contact and scheduling
 - Delayed behavioral health care can worsen...
 - Patient outcomes
 - Patient engagement
- Goal:**
- Implement Patient Support Corps (PSC) undergraduate interns in a special project to reduce patient wait times

Project Goals

- Reduce behavioral health wait times for UCSF-eligible patients
 - Refer UCSF-eligible patients to community resources while waiting
 - Refer UCSF-ineligible patients to care covered by their insurance
- Current State of Delays**
- 35 days between referral and scheduling of intake appointment
 - 49 days until the intake appointment
- Target State**
- Reduce time between referral and scheduling to 5 days
 - Minimize patient wait for new appointments

PROBLEM STATEMENT: Patient demand for IBH services exceeded scheduling capacity and appointment availability, resulting in (1) delays in accessing behavioral healthcare and (2) a lack of guidance in accessing in-network care when UCSF appointments are not available.

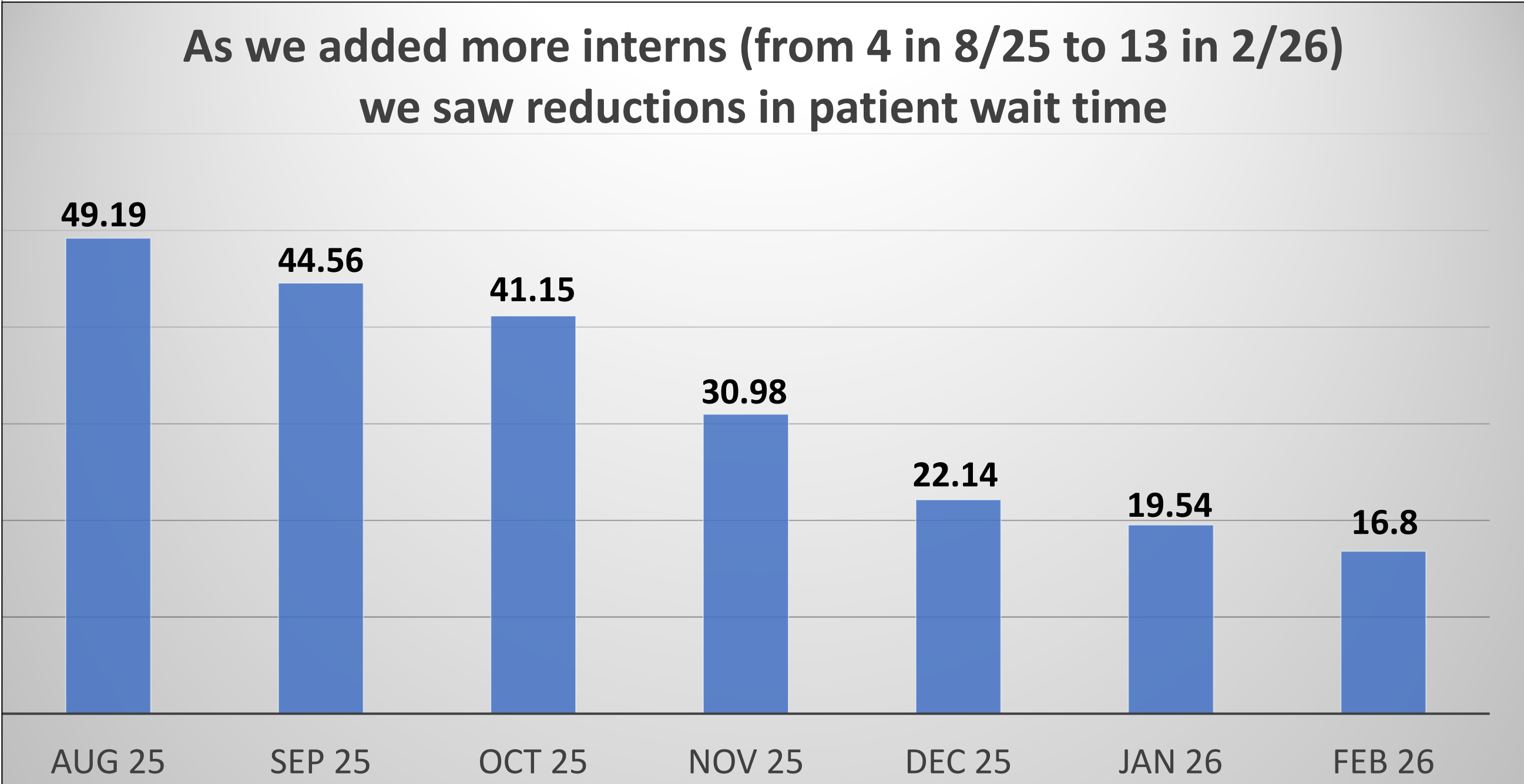
INTERNS HELPED REDUCE
TIME FROM REFERRAL TO SCHEDULING
FROM 35 TO 5 DAYS
AND TIME FROM REFERRAL TO INTAKE
FROM 49 TO 17 DAYS

Project Plan and Intervention

- We hypothesized that undergraduate interns working weekly half-days shifts on a special project would reduce the backlog of patient wait times.**
- IBH staff trained the interns on the following tasks:
 - Insurance benefit checks
 - Appointment scheduling via APeX
 - Intern coordinator and IBH staff administered a competency check
 - Ensured intern capacity for independence
- Intern coordinator met weekly with IBH staff to discuss workflow issues and implementation barriers:**
- Patient suicidal ideation and complex acute need
 - Defined escalation pathway to IBH patient navigator
 - Timely replies to patient MyChart messages with weekly intern shifts
 - Interns monitored each others' APeX in-baskets and replied
 - Care miscommunications with primary care providers (PCPs)
 - Interns communicated with PCPs to coordinate care

Project Outcomes, Results & Impact

- Between 8/2025 and 2/2026, interns helped the IBH team:**
- Process **3,043** referrals and schedule **1,328** (47%) appointments
 - Reduce patient contact time by **30 days** (35 to 5)
 - Days between referral and the scheduling of an appointment
 - Reduced patient wait time by **32 days** (49 to 17)
 - Days between referral and new patient appointment



Conclusions, Next Steps, & Lessons Learned

- Conclusions:** Student interns temporarily added capacity for patients to be connected to care faster and more efficiently. Patients waited less time to been by behavioral health providers at UCSF. When no appointments were available or patients were ineligible for IBH services, they received timely calls from student interns to assist in connecting to external, in-network behavioral health providers.
- Lessons Learned:**
- Continued intern learning – regular working sessions with IBH staff allow interns to ask questions, escalate, and handle exceptions
 - Care coordination – patients express frustration when receiving a call and are unaware of their referral or do not understand the IBH program
 - Patients appreciate community resources and navigation when appointments are not available or face financial barriers to UCSF care
 - **“In my 70 years of life, no one has ever taken the time to explain these resources to me like this”**