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A Better Model for Emergency Care

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Zeller '82 honored for creating new model in emergency psychiatric care

By SARAH (ZELLER) JULIAN '07

A new healthcare model created by physician Scott Zeller '82 is paving the way for faster, more affordable emergency psychiatric care.

Scott is chief of psychiatric emergency services at John George Psychiatric Hospital in San Leandro, Calif. His original research article demonstrating the effectiveness of a new model for emergency psychiatric care was endorsed by the *New England Journal of Medicine* and published by the *Western Journal of Emergency Medicine*.

He was honored with the California Hospital Association's Šimanek Distinguished Service Award, which recognizes a healthcare leader who promotes excellence in behavioral healthcare through outstanding contributions to hospitals and health services.



Scott Zeller

Scott's concept, known as the Alameda Model, strives to reduce delays for patients seeking psychiatric care through emergency rooms. "Patient boarding for long hours in emergency departments is a nationwide healthcare issue," he says. Psychiatric patients may wait hours or even days in emergency rooms before receiving necessary care. "I kept seeing media reports of psychiatric patients being kept for days in emergency rooms around the country and realized that there was the potential for the alternative designs we had developed to make an impact elsewhere," he says.

Scott's method calls for transferring patients to regional psychiatric emergency services, reducing wait times by more than 80 percent. "The Alameda Model focuses on immediate treatment at the outpatient level of care, with a goal of avoiding hospitalization altogether. It bypasses medical emergency rooms completely in two-thirds of cases, further reducing issues of regional ER overcrowding," he says.

The response to his journal article was "amazing," adds Scott. "Since its publication we have been contacted by representatives of dozens of communities across the nation, and many of those have come to visit our program to see it in action."

Scott, a biology major at IWU, holds a medical degree from Northwestern University and completed his psychiatry residency at the University of California, San Francisco.

“My time at IWU gave me a great foundation for doing medical research,” he says. “The understanding of the scientific method and the grounding in the sciences I obtained while at Illinois Wesleyan were top-notch.”

Scott is immediate past president of the American Association for Emergency Psychiatry and co-editor of *Emergency Psychiatry: Principles and Practice*.

He founded and directed Project BETA, a multi-center effort that published best practices guidelines for the evaluation and treatment of agitation in 2012. In 2009, he was named Alameda County Outstanding Physician of the Year, and in 2012 he won the *San Francisco Business Times*' "Heroes of Healthcare" award.