Swift, Easy Behavioral Health Referrals

Case Study: OptumCare

→ OptumCare, Southern California medical group with 17,000 doctors and ~200 locations

→ Behavioral health referrals to Rula **grew 212% in 12 months**

→ **80% of patients** experienced clinically meaningful improvement within eight weeks

Rula Patient Experience

- Rula emails and texts the OptumCare patient within two hours of receiving his or her name, date of birth, phone number, health insurance plan, and the reason for the referral.
- Patients click a link, input their details, and choose from a curated list of in-network mental health providers who accept new patients and match their preferences.
- An appointment is guaranteed within three days, though next-day availability is typical.
- Patients meet with a therapist via secure Zoom link.
- Rula provides every patient with a personalized cost estimate prior to the first appointment, and bills insurance directly, so patients don't have to pay upfront and seek reimbursement.

From here, Rula's partner receives seamless communication about the status of patient engagement and treatment.

Rula Partner Experience

- Rula updates OptumCare on whether or not the patient has scheduled services, so primary physicians can follow up.
- Once treatment begins, physicians can easily track patient progress. Using a secure e-fax system, Rula sends patient notes to OptumCare's central fax team, which uploads them to its EMR, and notifies doctors when records are available to review.
- Rula remains deeply engaged in operations, instantly addressing any patient or physician concerns or questions.

Data is uniform, because the therapists on Rula's platform use the same industry-recognized, clinical measures to track and measure the impact of care. Rula gives OptumCare quarterly data reviews that include the number of referrals, percentage of patients that started treatment, as well as overall progress metrics.

The Partner

OptumCare is a leading medical group in Southern California, with a network of more than 17,000 primary and specialty care doctors across nearly 200 locations, including 80 urgent care centers and 40 leading hospitals. Named the *Los Angeles Times'* "Best Medical Group of the Southland" three years in a row, OptumCare delivers coordinated, patient-centered care powered by technology, clinical expertise, and strong partnerships. Through value-based insurance arrangements, OptumCare offers comprehensive services that prioritize timely, high-quality, and affordable care.

The Challenge

OptumCare's primary care physicians (PCPs) often struggled to connect patients with behavioral health services. PCPs typically advised patients to contact their insurance provider or search through in-network directories. However, many patients had trouble finding local providers who accepted new patients—and when they did, long wait times were common.

OptumCare wanted to make it faster and easier for PCPs to connect patients directly with behavioral health care. Equally critical, the medical group sought a consistent way to measure patient outcomes and keep PCPs informed to ensure care remained coordinated and comprehensive. But that proved daunting: Behavioral health networks are often fragmented, with providers using different screening tools, outcome measures, and electronic medical record systems (EMRs). As a result, behavioral health treatment is frequently siloed from primary care, making true integration difficult.

The Approach

In October 2022, OptumCare partnered with Rula. Within six months, Rula built out the platform and custom website with a simple form doctors could complete in less than a minute to make a referral. Patients then go through a simple flow for digital booking, appointments, and billing.

Rula

The Outcome

Rula made it easy, swift, and seamless for OptumCare physicians to make behavioral health referrals, which grew 212% between 2023 and 2024.

Enrollment rates quickly met OptumCare benchmarks, and patients are receiving the care they need, with 80% experiencing clinically meaningful improvement within eight weeks.

OptumCare immediately reaped the benefits from Rula's measurement-informed approach, which facilitates better care and helps the medical group more effectively manage costs. For example, the data showed that in 10 sessions:

- Patients at risk of self-harm as measured by the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS) saw an 80% improvement
- 73% of patients experienced clinically meaningful improvement within eight weeks. (Among patients with moderate to severe symptoms at baseline, clinically meaningful change is either a 5+ point improvement on the PHQ-9 or a 4+ point improvement on the GAD-7)

Nationally, Rula's network includes 18,000+ licensed providers, representing more than 90 clinical specialties and modalities, 39 languages, 18 faiths and religions, and a wide range of backgrounds. Nearly half of the therapists in the network are Black, indigenous, or people of color. Some 97% of searches for a therapist result in an exact match.

> " Rula's team has been very responsive, and acts urgently to address our needs and any issues that arise. Rula has been highly collaborative, continually iterating on processes to make it even easier for physicians to make referrals. Rula does everything possible to ensure our patients receive high-quality behavioral health care. Rula's speed, flexibility, and regular reporting are very valuable to us."
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> John Rivera
> Associate Director, Strategy and Operations, OptumCare

OptumCare physicians can refer with confidence, as therapists on the Rula platform are fully licensed, and undergo a thorough background check and clinical review. Meanwhile, Rula's systems and tools are HIPAA-compliant and employ the latest security measures, and all employees and therapists in the network undergo training on best practices for safeguarding patient data.

Comprehensive support is the foundation of Rula's platform

Rula's dedicated team is available by phone and email to help patients with therapist selection, billing issues, insurance questions and more. Rula continually engages OptumCare's providers to learn about and replicate successes, and innovate to solve challenges. For example, OptumCare found that about half of patients wanted an in-person behavioral health option. Rula developed a solution and targeted several regions with the highest demand for the roll out in 2025.

About Rula

Rula makes mental healthcare accessible and affordable through our network of licensed providers and unified technology platform. We connect patients with personalized in-network care within three days, typically for $0-$25 per session.

Our HIPAA-compliant solution simplifies the experience for employers, health plans, and insurance brokers while delivering measurable outcomes. Visit rula.com to learn how your organization can partner with Rula.

Learn more about Rula

Get Started