

Pearl Behavioral Health Flags a Late-Summer Rise in Anxiety Across Hilton Head

The Lowcountry psychiatric practice is highlighting seasonal patterns in anxiety and mood as its growing clinical team meets rising demand for evaluations

HILTON HEAD, SC, UNITED STATES, August 17, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As Hilton Head Island's tourist season eases and the Lowcountry settles into its off-season rhythm, Pearl Behavioral Health is calling attention to a pattern its clinical team sees every year: [anxiety](#) doesn't quiet down just because the beaches do. The shift out of summer includes school schedules restarting, seasonal jobs winding down, part-time residents packing up, and the steady creep of shorter days. The practice considers this one of the more overlooked stress points of the year for people across the Hilton Head and Bluffton area.



Anxiety disorders are already the most common [mental health](#) condition in the country. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, an estimated 19.1% of U.S. adults experience an anxiety disorder in any given year. In a community like Hilton Head, shaped by a large retiree population, a tourism-driven economy that swings sharply with the seasons, and a sizable share of residents managing long-distance caregiving for aging parents, those national numbers tend to show up locally in very specific ways.

"Late summer is when the pattern really shows up in the office," said Jennifer Reilly, PMHNP-BC, who joined Pearl Behavioral Health's clinical team this year. "Families are adjusting to school starting back up, seasonal employees are watching their hours shrink as the island quiets down, and people who split their time between here and up north are starting to think about leaving again. None of that is unusual on its own, but when a few of those changes stack up at once, that's often when generalized anxiety starts to surface or gets worse. I'd rather see someone early and get a clear picture of what's going on than wait until it's affecting their sleep, their work, or their relationships."

Recognizing Generalized Anxiety as the Season Turns

Not every case of end-of-summer stress is a clinical concern, and the practice's providers are careful to draw that distinction with patients. But generalized anxiety disorder is defined by a specific pattern: persistent, excessive worry that shows up on most days for six months or longer, spans multiple areas of life, and comes with physical symptoms such as muscle tension, restlessness, disrupted sleep, and trouble concentrating. When those symptoms start interfering with a person's ability to work, parent, or maintain relationships, Pearl Behavioral Health considers it a signal that it's time for a full evaluation rather than something to push through alone.

The practice's approach to generalized anxiety leans on measurement-based care, using the validated GAD-7 screening tool at every visit to track symptom severity over time, paired with 30- to 60-minute evaluations that give providers room to understand

what's actually driving a patient's anxiety before recommending treatment. First-line treatment typically involves SSRIs or SNRIs, with non-sedating options such as buspirone considered as an adjunct. The practice deliberately avoids benzodiazepines as a long-term anxiety solution, citing dependence risk and cognitive side effects with extended use, a position consistent with guidance from the American Psychiatric Association and the Anxiety & [Depression](#) Association of America.

Providers at Pearl Behavioral Health point to a few practical signs that end-of-season stress has crossed into something worth evaluating: worry that persists most days for weeks rather than lifting once a specific event passes, physical symptoms like a racing heart or chronic muscle tension that show up even when nothing acute is happening, and any noticeable pullback from work, family, or routines that used to feel manageable. None of those signs, on their own, means a person needs medication, but the practice considers them a reasonable trigger for a



**Dr. Gabby
Farkas**
MD, PhD

conversation with a psychiatric provider rather than something to monitor indefinitely.

A Second Seasonal Signal: Preparing for Shorter Days Before They Arrive

Alongside anxiety, Pearl Behavioral Health is using the end of summer to raise awareness of a second, related concern: seasonal affective disorder, or SAD. Unlike anxiety, which can flare at any point in a stressful transition, SAD follows a predictable seasonal pattern tied to reduced daylight exposure and disruption to the body's circadian rhythm, typically emerging in fall and winter before resolving in spring.

The practice treats late summer, not November, as the right time to start paying attention. As it notes on its seasonal affective disorder resource page, by the time most people notice they're waking up later, eating differently, and struggling to concentrate, they're often already several weeks into a seasonal depressive episode. "I tell patients not to wait for the fog to roll in before they act," Reilly said. "If you've had seasonal mood changes before, late summer is when we start talking about a plan, not January." For patients with a documented history of seasonal mood changes, treatment options include light therapy, typically 10,000 lux for 20 to 30 minutes shortly after waking, along with bupropion XL, which is FDA-approved specifically for preventing recurrent major depressive episodes tied to seasonal patterns, and structured psychotherapy. Because SAD and generalized anxiety can overlap or be mistaken for one another, especially during a transitional season, Pearl Behavioral Health emphasizes a full psychiatric evaluation rather than a self-diagnosed starting point.

Hilton Head's tourism economy runs heaviest from spring through fall, its hurricane season stretches from June through November, and a significant share of its population, from seasonal hospitality workers to part-year residents, experiences a genuine shift in routine or income as summer ends. Pearl Behavioral Health has long focused on how those regional realities intersect with mental health.

A Growing Clinical Team

Pearl Behavioral Health's clinical team now includes Jennifer Reilly, PMHNP-BC, a board-certified Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner with nine years of experience treating adults with depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, PTSD, and ADHD, along with co-occurring substance use disorders, including alcohol and benzodiazepine detoxification, an area many outpatient practices don't address.

Reilly practices under the same clinical standards the practice was built on: measurement-based evaluations, extended appointment times, and a collaborative approach to treatment planning. "I believe in a holistic approach that treats the whole person, recognizing that every individual's journey is unique," Reilly said, describing a philosophy that treats sleep, stress, relationships, medical history, and substance use as interconnected drivers of a patient's symptoms and treatment response, rather than evaluating any one factor in isolation.

Reilly's addition comes as Pearl Behavioral Health heads into what is typically its busiest stretch of the year, when returning school and work routines, combined with the seasonal shift already

described, tend to drive a noticeable uptick in patients seeking evaluation for anxiety and mood concerns. With two providers now seeing patients, the practice is able to offer shorter waits for an initial evaluation without changing the depth of care each visit involves. Reilly joins founder Dr. Gabriella I. Farkas, MD PhD, a board-certified psychiatrist who has led the practice since it opened in Bluffton, South Carolina.

Access and Scheduling

Pearl Behavioral Health provides in-person psychiatric care from its Bluffton office, with consultations available to Hilton Head Island residents, and offers telepsychiatry throughout South Carolina, New York, and Virginia. That telehealth option matters for patients who split time between Hilton Head and another state during the off-season: research has found telepsychiatry outcomes comparable to in-person care, letting patients keep the same provider after they leave the island for the year. The practice is in-network with Aetna and Cigna, and typically responds to new inquiries within one business day, with new patient appointments generally available within two to four weeks. Residents interested in an evaluation for anxiety, seasonal mood changes, or a general psychiatric consultation can schedule an appointment with Dr. Farkas or Jennifer Reilly, PMHNP-BC, directly through the practice's website.

Pearl Behavioral Health encourages anyone experiencing persistent worry, mood changes, or disruptions to sleep and daily functioning, particularly as the season turns, not to wait for symptoms to resolve on their own before seeking an evaluation.

About Pearl Behavioral Health

Pearl Behavioral Health is a psychiatric practice based in Bluffton, South Carolina, serving Hilton Head Island and the broader Lowcountry, with telehealth available across South Carolina, New York, and Virginia. The practice was founded by Dr. Gabriella I. Farkas, MD PhD, a board-certified psychiatrist. Dr. Farkas earned her Doctor of Medicine from Semmelweis University in Budapest, Hungary, and later completed a PhD in Neuroscience at the same institution. She trained in psychodynamic psychotherapy at Tündérhegy, the European Psychotherapy Training Institute, completed her psychiatry residency at Hofstra North Shore-LIJ School of Medicine at Hofstra University, and pursued additional training in functional medicine through The Institute for Functional Medicine. She is joined on the clinical team by Jennifer Reilly, PMHNP-BC, a board-certified Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner with nine years of experience in adult psychiatric care. Together, they provide comprehensive adult psychiatric care, including general psychiatry, treatment-resistant depression, bipolar disorder care, geriatric psychiatry, perinatal and postpartum psychiatry, and second-opinion consultations. Learn more at drgabbyfarkas.com.

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