blue of california foundation

Spreading the Adoption of eConsult in California's Healthcare Safety Net

Electronic Consultation (eConsult) is a delivery system innovation that enables primary care providers and specialists to consult electronically about a patient's conditions, determine the optimal manner of care, and engage in effective co-management of patient conditions.

Pilot testing of eConsult has taken place at San Francisco General Hospital, the University of California, San Francisco, the Los Angeles Department of Health Services, and the L.A. Care Health Plan. The strong success of eConsult in Los Angeles and San Francisco is generating interest in replicating the system from safety net healthcare providers around the state. This interest is heightened by the expansion of Medi-Cal enrollment to over 11 million people, which promises to increase demand for access to specialty care by vulnerable Californians. To inform the Foundation's efforts to further spread this innovation across California's safety net, in August 2014, the Foundation partnered with the UCLA Institute for Innovation in Health to host an eConsult Expert Stakeholder Roundtable that brought together nine health systems that are early adopters of eConsult. Participants in the convening shared strong enthusiasm for the performance of their eConsult systems and believe that the concept has been proven.

Each of these grants aims to improve system-level integration of primary and specialty care in the safety net in California through planning and implementation of eConsult. Not only will this grant cohort improve care coordination for vulnerable Californians, but also it will advance the Foundation's long-term vision for payment reform in the safety net to incentivize value over volume as reimbursement practices shift to pay for care delivered in ways other than a face-to-face visit and payers begin to look at system optimization using measures reflecting the total cost of care.

Through these grants, the Foundation aims to spread, scale, and help create a critical mass of eConsult implementations across the state.

GRANT SUMMARIES:

Los Angeles County Department of Health Services

The Los Angeles County Department of Health Services (LADHS) is the second largest health system in the nation; it serves the healthcare needs of nearly 10 million residents and encompasses hospital and out-patient care, programs and clinics, emergency medical services and rehabilitation services. In 2011, the Foundation made an investment in LADHS to establish 21 specialty-primary care work groups that were critical to successful implementation of eConsult in Los Angeles, where it now serves over 200 locations with over 2,000 physicians and 248 specialists. Under this grant, LADHS seeks to broaden its specialty care transformation efforts by: 1) increasing the number of specialty-primary care workgroups and convening stakeholders regularly; 2) integrating workgroups into their emerging centralized performance improvement infrastructure (also supported through a previous grant from the Foundation); 3) developing accurate and meaningful dashboards to quantify remaining gaps in demand and supply for specialty care, and better understand the impact of interventions and innovations designed to address these gaps; and 4) implementing broad improvements in care delivery that will reduce variations in specialty care access across the system.

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The Regents of the University of California, San Francisco

The University of California, San Francisco's Department of Family and Community Medicine (UCSF) is nationally known for training family physicians dedicated to providing service to underserved populations, and has a longstanding partnership with San Francisco General Hospital, the first public hospital system in California to implement eConsult. Physician leaders at UCSF have been conducting research and publishing articles on the impact of eConsult in the safety net. One of the research gaps they have identified is that there exists very limited knowledge and understanding of the potential role(s) for patients and/or families in eConsult models of care. To date, eConsult has focused on provider-to-provider communication and remains largely invisible to the patient. If one of the desired outcomes of eConsult is more effective co-management of patient conditions, the introduction of patients and families to the model has the potential to enhance shared communication and decision-making. In this study, UCSF will apply a User-Centered Design process to assess the level of interest among patients and families in engaging in eConsult models of care. It will seek to understand what a patient-centered system would look like through patient focus groups, surveys of primary care physicians, and specialist focus groups.

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Alameda Health System Foundation

The Alameda Health System (AHS) includes four hospitals and four ambulatory wellness centers and serves a large proportion of Medi-Cal and uninsured patients in Alameda County who have limited or no access to specialty care services. AHS has created a strategic plan for extending specialty care services by partnering with local, private Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and/or by opening specialty clinics. In partnership with Alameda County Health Services Agency and the Community Health Center Network, AHS has also begun exploring eConsult as a potential access solution and has gained support to move to implementation. With a strong project leadership team and significant buy-in from key administrative and physician leaders, AHS will assess current referral procedures, propose new guidelines and standards, and assess technology options for eConsult before shifting to phase two. This second phase will focus on building and testing the technology, establishing new workflows, training physicians, launching pilots with 2 to 3 specialties, and executing a spread and sustainability strategy.

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San Mateo Medical Center

San Mateo Medical Center (SMMC) is comprised of ten affiliated clinics and a community clinic partner, the Ravenswood Family Health Center (Ravenswood), and operates eight outpatient clinics and an acute-care hospital throughout San Mateo County. In 2013, San Mateo Medical Center provided approximately 40,000 specialty care visits to an estimated 26,000 adult patients. As the only county hospital for San Mateo County, SMMC serves as the primary referral hub for low-income and uninsured patients in the area, who experience significant wait times for specialty care services. With this grant, SMMC seeks to implement eConsult with ten affiliated clinics and then expand to Ravenswood Community Health Center. This will include a robust planning and assessment phase before building and testing the technology, establishing new workflows, training physicians, launching a pilot, and ultimately executing a spread and sustainability strategy.

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Council of Community Clinics

The Council of Community Clinics (CCC) is a group of 16 community clinic and health center organizations operating more than 100 sites throughout San Diego, Imperial, and Riverside counties. CCC supports community clinics and health centers that serve low-income and uninsured populations. Without a public hospital system in San Diego or Imperial counties, the majority of specialty care is provided by specialists in private practice or through the University of California-San Diego. Patients in both counties also struggle to access specialty care due to financial, transportation, and language barriers. Building upon initial planning conversations, CCC is now pursuing additional stakeholder engagement to develop buy-in for eConsult and move toward implementation in San Diego and/or Imperial Counties. This process includes convening physicians and administrative leaders from providers and plans, identifying a leadership team, determining roles and responsibilities for partners, analyzing workflows, developing guidelines for eConsult activities, and agreeing upon sites and specialties to pilot.

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Community Clinic Association of San Bernardino County

The Community Clinic Association of San Bernardino County (CCASBC) is a membership organization comprised of 18 safety net clinic systems representing 52 clinic sites throughout San Bernardino County. In 2012, CCASBC began a Specialty Care Initiative to improve the County's system of specialty care, increase patient access and utilization, and provide an

effective system for patient education and navigation. Arrowhead Regional Medical Center (ARMC) is the only county hospital in San Bernardino and currently offers 23 specialty clinics and approximately 20 sub specialty clinics. Many of these specialties are greatly impacted by growing numbers of referrals, creating long wait times for patients. With support from Inland Empire Health Plan and ARMC leadership, CCASBC will engage with these partners in the planning process toward eConsult implementation. Specific activities include convening physician and administrative leaders from both systems, identifying a leadership team to guide the process, analyzing workflows and developing guidelines, gaining consensus on the technology solution, and agreeing upon sites and specialties to pilot.

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Santa Clara Valley Health and Hospital System

Santa Clara Valley Health and Hospital System (SCVHHS) provides a wide range of primary and specialty medical services and oversees public health programs for the all county residents. Santa Clara's county-operated safety net currently serves more than 250,000 residents, and the community health centers that are members of the local consortium, known as the "Community Health Partnership (CHP)", serve over 160,000 county residents. Despite growing demand for specialty care, there is still limited communication and coordination between specialists and primary care providers across the county. To overcome this barrier, SCVHHS will partner with CHP to engage stakeholders in the planning process for eConsult implementation. Specific activities include convening physician and administrative leaders from providers and plans, identifying a leadership team, analyzing workflows and developing guidelines for eConsult, gaining consensus on the technology solution, and agreeing upon specialties to pilot.

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Monterey County Health Department

Monterey County Health Department (MCHD) seeks to promote and protect the health of individuals, families and communities in Monterey County. MCHD clinics currently contract for specialty services with Natividad Medical Center, University of California-San Francisco, Stanford University, and a variety of community physicians. The county-organized health System, known as "the Central California Alliance for Health," has added thousands of new Medi-Cal patients as a result of coverage expansions under the ACA. Many of these newly insured patients suffer from multiple conditions that have been left untreated for years, thus increasing the need for specialty services. Specialist shortages have created long wait times, which are exacerbated by a lack of specialists who speak Spanish - the primary language of over 70 percent of Monterey's safety net population. Currently, MCHD clinics are only able to communicate electronically with specialists at Stanford, given that both facilities are on the

same electronic health record platform To broaden this type of communication, MCHD will assess the feasibility of implementing eConsult across the entire county system. Project activities will begin by engaging key primary care, specialty, and hospital providers in the county to discuss specialty access challenges and the potential for eConsult to address them. Planning will also include meeting with systems that have adopted eConsult to discuss lessons learned, conducting one-on-one interviews, and analyzing the feasibility of pursuing eConsult implementation in Monterey County.

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Kern Medical Center

Kern Medical Center (KMC) is a major provider of specialty care in the safety net, and is experiencing wait times of up to 6 months for certain specialties. This grant will support a partnership between KMC, the county's public hospital system, and its clinic partners, Clinica Sierra Vista and Omni Family Health, to assess the feasibility of implementing eConsult across all clinic sites to help meet the specialty care needs of its safety net patients in an integrated and timely way. Project activities will include building and strengthening relationships and communication between primary care providers and specialists; identifying changes in workflows necessary to implement eConsult; exploring current technology and eConsult technical solutions; and developing a sustainable financial model for eConsult in the county.

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Contra Costa Regional Medical Center

Contra Costa Regional Medical Center (CCRMC), the county's public health system, has seen dramatic increases in patient visits, and some of CCRMC's 40 specialties have wait lists of more than 6 months. With little extra space and staff to accommodate increased demand for specialty clinics, CCRMC is pursuing innovative ways to improve access and coordinate care. In preparation for piloting and full implementation of eConsult, the CCRMC team will build and strengthen relationships and communication between primary care providers and specialists; identify changes in workflows necessary to implement eConsult; explore eConsult technical solutions; and develop clear next steps for piloting eConsult in the county.

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San Joaquin General Hospital

San Joaquin General Hospital (SJGH) has historically been the major provider of specialty care to safety net patients in San Joaquin County, however significant wait times for appointments for patients referred to see an SJGH specialist are impacting referring provider relationships and patient access. This funding will support a SJGH-led team to partner with San Joaquin County Clinics, Community Medical Centers (a local FQHC), and Health Plan of San Joaquin to assess if

eConsult is a feasible and effective solution for addressing these specialty access challenges. Project activities will include building and strengthening relationships and communication between primary care providers and specialists; identifying changes in workflows necessary to implement eConsult; exploring current technology and eConsult technical solutions; and exploring a sustainable financial model for eConsult in the county.

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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE & POLICY PARTNERS

The Regents of the University of California, San Francisco

San Francisco General Hospital was one of the early adopters of eConsult, and its physicians are part of the UCSF Center for Innovation in Access & Quality (CIAQ). UCSF will provide technical assistance (TA) to three Northern California eConsult pilot sites. Their support will include helping each site develop workflow designs, expected practices, training for specialty reviewers, and other efforts to accelerate eConsult implementation. UCSF will also take the lead in creating standardized performance measures that will help all six eConsult grantees evaluate their progress and success. In addition, UCSF will work with the Center for Connected Health Policy to develop policy and reimbursement strategies for making eConsult a more sustainable innovation.

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Community Partners

Community Partners will provide technical assistance and coaching for grantees based in Southern California (San Diego and San Bernardino Counties) and conduct a feasibility assessment around the use of eConsult in Monterey County. Community Partners will also partner with UCSF to create standardized performance measures that will help all six eConsult grantees evaluate their progress and success.

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Center for Connected Health Policy @ the Public Health Institute

The Public Health Institute's Center for Connected Health Policy (CCHP) will scan the current landscape of policies and practices related to eConsult. This includes conducting interviews with payers and providers in California, as well as developing a comprehensive roadmap that clearly

outlines existing regulatory and policy barriers for eConsult implementation. This analysis will then be used to develop a set of recommendations for expanding the use of eConsult throughout the state. Over time, this grant aims to advance a state policy agenda around new reimbursement models and opportunities - such as the Section 1115 Medicaid waiver – that could facilitate the spread and sustainability of eConsult. CCHP will also partner with UCSF to create standardized performance measures that will help all six eConsult grantees evaluate their progress and success.

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BluePath Health

Among grantees working to adopt eConsult, a common issue that has surfaced is the need for technology solutions that work across systems and providers using different electronic health record platforms (EHR). BluePath Health will develop a comprehensive assessment of available technology options for electronic consultation and referrals and examine issues related to interoperability across systems. BluePath Health will also coach grantees in selecting eConsult tools that meet their unique needs.

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