

Spreading Adoption of eConsult in the 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 23 specialty-primary care work groups that were critical to successful implementation of eConsult in Los Angeles, where it now serves over 202 locations with over 2,000 physicians and 470 specialists, and operating among 60 specialties. Under this grant, LADHS seeks to better understand the drivers of effective use of eConsult and to uncover best practices in incentivizing provider participation and engagement. LADHS will design, carry out, and analyze research to this end, and will identify and disseminate insights into engaging providers through non-monetary incentives.

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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 project, UCSF will conduct the first research of its kind on patient perception and experience with eConsult, building on its experience as an early adopter. Guidance on patient-centered communication will be developed and tested, and findings will be shared with the field through peer reviewed publications and webinars.

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President and Fellows of Harvard College

Harvard College's Departments of Healthcare Policy, and Health Policy and Management located in the Medical School and School of Public Health respectively, have a long track record of producing high quality, high-impact evaluations of delivery systems such as the health disparities collaborative within community health centers. An evaluation team comprised of researchers from these two departments, as well as University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, will partner with the Los Angeles Department of Health Services to assess the impact of its eConsult initiative on emergency department utilization and hospitalization, as well as the impact on physician experience, referral patterns and knowledge gain related to specialty conditions. Specialty sensitive emergency department utilization and hospitalization statewide will also be examined to identify geographic areas that may benefit from eConsult implementation. This project is a result of requests from providers, payers and policymakers for more empirical evidence demonstrating eConsult's impact, despite consensus among early adopters that eConsult is a proven practice.

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Alameda Health System Foundation

Alameda Health System (AHS), which includes five hospitals and four ambulatory wellness centers, serves a large proportion of Alameda County's Medi-Cal and uninsured patients, and those who have limited or no access to specialty care services. AHS is in the process of creating a strategic plan for increasing specialty care access in the County's safety-net health system, and in partnership with Alameda County Health Services Agency (HCSA) and the Community

Health Center Network (CHCN) has begun eConsult implementation. With a strong project leadership team and significant buy-in from key administrative and physician leaders, AHS assessed current referral procedures, implemented new guidelines and standards, and assessed technology options for eConsult. Subsequent to this, AHS implemented six (6) specialties for internal eConsults, and partnered with CHCN and RubiconMD to build an interface between CHCN PCPs and AHS specialists in these specialty areas. CHCN plans to expand the platform to all clinics in the coming months, while AHS works to increase eConsult uptake both internally and externally. Additionally, AHS plans to roll out an additional specialty—for both internal and external eConsults—at a rate of approximately one specialty every two months through June 2017.

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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. SMMC's planning work has included identification of access gaps and project champions, mapping of workflows, development of specialty guidelines, and securement of a technology vendor. In this next phase of work, SMMC seeks to accomplish the following as it continues its journey toward implementation: 1) pilot eConsult at two clinics with 1-2 specialties and refine workflows; 2) pilot and spread primary care and specialist reviewer trainings; 3) spread eConsult to 11 primary care clinics and additional specialties; and 4) track implementation progress and impact through collecting Quadruple Aim metrics developed under the Foundation's eConsult Initiative.

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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, the county experienced limited communication and coordination between specialists and primary care providers. SCVHHS engaged in a planning process that resulted in identification of Active Referral Management as a key avenue for improving specialty care access; eConsult and eReferral were ultimately put on a single path to control unnecessary referrals. SCVHHS is currently teaming up with Community Health Partnership, Inc., a consortium

of community health centers, to pilot, evaluate, and refine workflows in preparation for system-wide electronic consultations in Santa Clara 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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PAST GRANTS:

Health Center Partners of Southern California

Health Center Partners of Southern California (HCPSOCAL), formerly known as Council of Community Clinics, is a group of 16 community clinic and health center organizations operating more than 100 sites throughout San Diego, Imperial, and Riverside counties. HCPSOCAL 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 (UCSD). The county's structure provides unique challenges to implementation of new technology, while patients in both counties struggle to access specialty care due to financial, transportation, and language barriers. With Foundation funding, HCPSOCAL conducted a thorough environmental scan and assessed readiness of its member health centers and partners for an eConsult solution to specialty care access issues; the recommendation was made to partner with UCSD given its strong technological infrastructure, specialist provider buy-in, and existing health plan engagement. Though HCPSOCAL will not implement eConsult at this time pending readiness of UCSD's eConsult system to connect with other electronic health record systems, its workplan for eConsult in the safety net and the processes involved for arriving at its conclusions are a useful resource for similar endeavors and county structures. Access the report [here](#).

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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 engaged with these partners in the planning process toward eConsult implementation. A Technology and Specialty Care Questionnaire was conducted among clinic membership to identify referral volumes, backlogs, patterns, processes, and challenges. Clinic utilization of technology, participation in meaningful use, and health information technology utilization were also captured. Though there is provider buy-in regarding implementation, methods for health information exchange among agencies is a challenge. This analysis will continue to aid CCASBC in addressing the potential for eConsult and/or other forms of technology to address specialty care access challenges.

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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 completed a feasibility assessment of eConsult implementation across the entire county system. They plan to use the feasibility report created with Foundation funding as the roadmap for implementation planning, with an emphasis on leveraging current forums to engage providers, a staged approach to implementation, and members of the Safety Net Integration Council serving as key leaders.

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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE and 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 continue to provide technical assistance (TA) and evaluation support to eConsult pilot sites. They will build on prior funded efforts to develop a Quadruple Aim measurement framework and to conduct the first research of its kind on patient perception and experience with eConsult. UCSF will also support community partners and the Foundation with evaluating individual sites and the cohort using the Quadruple Aim framework, administering specialist reviewer training to new implementation sites, developing and testing new guidance on patient-centered communication, and sharing findings with the field through peer reviewed publications and webinars.

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The Institute for High Quality Care

The Institute for High Quality Care (IHQC), formerly Community Partners, has served as a partner to the Foundation's eConsult initiative since the beginning. IHQC provides guidance on strategy

and design, technical assistance to grantees, and logistical support on key activities involving all partners. With this grant, IQHC will lead quarterly conference calls with the Foundation and consultants, quarterly web based presentations for grantees, and a statewide in-person convening for grantees to share lessons learned. The outcomes from these endeavors will include improved coordination of resources and expertise between consultants and technical assistance providers, and highly-rated fora that encourage eConsult grantees to learn and share promising practices. IHQC's work will effectively provide a forum for the exchange of emerging strategies, and identification of solutions for strategic challenges faced by the eConsult cohort.

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Center for Connected Health Policy @ the Public Health Institute

The Public Health Institute's [Center for Connected Health Policy \(CCHP\)](#) seeks to create a shared understanding among California healthcare stakeholders of the associated benefits of eConsult and to engage state and federal leadership in recognizing eConsult as a reimbursable activity. To accomplish this, CCHP will (1) scan the current field of eConsult for relevant metrics to demonstrate value of e-consult (2) engage key stakeholders (including DHCS, health plans, and providers) in identifying possible reimbursement strategies and policies, and (3) develop and disseminate a recommended reimbursement model. This grant builds off of CCHP's prior work that consisted of a national scan to identify e-consult best practices and the policy challenges that inhibit the spread and scale of eConsult. If successful, this project will create a policy dialogue that may lead to a reimbursement model for California stakeholders to adopt and implement in order to spread and scale e-consult.

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BluePath Health

BluePath Health's technical assistance work in the first year of the eConsult initiative focused on technology, as a common issue that surfaced among grantees was the need for technology solutions that work across systems and providers using different electronic health record platforms (EHR). BluePath developed a comprehensive assessment of [available technology options](#) for electronic consultation and referrals and examined issues related to interoperability across systems. They also coached grantees in selecting eConsult tools that met their unique needs. Moving forward, BluePath will continue to focus on technology while expanding their work in policy and process-related issues including workflow and change management. Their work with local communities on policy will create a groundswell for the state-based strategy being advanced by Center for Connected Health Policy.

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