

“WALK A MILE” - NAVIGATING THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM: THE PATIENT & PROVIDER PERSPECTIVE

PROJECT IMPACT STATEMENT

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PROJECT TITLE

“*Walk a Mile*” - Navigating the Healthcare System: The Patient & Provider Perspective

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Access to quality care is a concern for most communities across the nation as businesses and organizations are facing budget cuts and layoffs. The Oneida-Herkimer-Madison County region is not unfamiliar to these challenges. According to the Oneida County Community Health Data Book, insurance coverage estimates for 2008 indicate that 24,777 individuals under the age of 65 have no health insurance. Results of a community survey administered in 2008 by Faxton-St. Luke’s Hospital to 400 individuals in Oneida and Herkimer Counties revealed that affordable health care was rated as the number one healthcare issue facing the community. In addition, seven of the top ten healthcare issues selected in the survey were in one way or another related to insurance coverage and costs, physician shortages and quality healthcare services.

Increasing unemployment rates means an increase in the number of individuals that are under/uninsured or require public insurance. The stressors of economic hardship are compounded as individuals find themselves adjusting to new and unfamiliar ways of accessing healthcare in a system with limited amounts of providers that accept the publicly or uninsured, all of which may make navigating an already complex healthcare system more daunting and frustrating for patients and providers alike. Most of the uninsured are adults from working families with low incomes as they are less likely than children to be eligible for Medicaid (Kaiser). All of these factors may be a deterrent to accessing preventive screening and treatment services, as well as dental and mental health services, which places them at greater risk for disease and disability. Health insurance status makes a difference in if, where and when people get necessary health care, and ultimately in how healthy they are. The consequences of reduced access to care over time can be serious, including preventable hospitalizations, declines in overall health, disability, and premature death (Kaiser). It is likely that worsening economic conditions will exacerbate access to care issues for vulnerable populations and place increased demands on an already-burdened health system, further jeopardizing the health and well-being of our communities. This issue is further compounded by factors associated with health literacy, which is defined as “the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.” Patient health literacy is affected by providers who use words that patients don’t understand, low educational skills, cultural barriers and Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

Providers too face challenges in providing quality services to their clients. According to the February 22, 2009 Observer-Dispatch, there were millions of dollars written off in 2008 by the three major hospitals in Oneida County “due to people who didn’t pay their medical bills because they were uninsured, underinsured or didn’t make enough money to pay their medical expense.” A shortage of healthcare providers makes access to care a challenge for all individuals regardless of their insurance status. Difficulty in recruiting physicians is a nationwide problem that is made more difficult in New York State because of the high costs of malpractice insurance. General practitioners in Central New York, especially those accepting Medicaid, carry large caseloads of 3,000 to 4,000 patients. In addition to these demands, providers that do accept public insurance are encumbered with nominal reimbursement rates, multiple payment refusals, onerous paperwork, and high rates of patient non-compliance. High costs of malpractice insurance and the increased difficulties of caring for uninsured patients may be reasons why

some physicians are forgoing family medicine to practice in specialty fields, adding to the shortage of primary care providers and augmenting the problems associated with access to health care.

This project will investigate barriers to service for both providers and patients and educate both groups in an attempt to change behavior. Patients may reap significant benefits by developing a better understanding of the environment that providers must “live” in and the realities and obstacles that they face in serving them. A better understanding of their healthcare environment can empower patients to take charge of their health, improve their ability to navigate the healthcare system, and compel them to be proactive in partnering with their healthcare providers to receive the best care possible. Conversely, a deeper awareness and understanding of the obstacles and hardships that patients face in accessing care can allow healthcare and service providers to strengthen and improve the client/provider partnership, decrease patient non-compliance, and lessen the demands placed on them. In addition, understanding barriers to care for patients may lead providers to change organizational and personal practices that contribute to patient non-compliance and no-show rates. Improved compliance with care will result in higher levels of reimbursement for providers, enabling them to cover their operating costs and continue to provide services to Medicaid and privately insured patients. This project will engage and enlighten the community on the perspectives of the patient and provider with the objective of improving access to health care and the overall health and quality-of-life in our region by allowing both patient and provider to “walk a mile” in the figurative shoes of the other.

The primary deliverable from this project is the development and promotion of a video/documentary that investigates and informs about access to healthcare issues from the viewpoint of the client and the provider. Its purpose is to tell a “360-degree” story of access to care in our tri-county region (Herkimer, Madison and Oneida) while building awareness of the barriers that clients and providers face. It will educate the community about and improve their ability to navigate through our regional healthcare system. Both providers and clients will receive information on what each can do to minimize barriers to care and improve the client/provider partnership. The story will be told from a neutral perspective that provides the viewer with a behind-the-scenes understanding of the healthcare system as told by regional providers. Providers will explain the strengths and weaknesses of the existing healthcare system and enlighten the community on the sometimes unseen barriers they face in providing care. Providers will also be asked to offer practical recommendations to those that find themselves uninsured and in need of access to preventive or treatment services. Uninsured and publicly insured community members will relate their positive and negative experiences so that viewers and providers better understand the scope of their issues and the frustrations associated with accessing health care.

The video will be produced and run as an educational series on the local network, as well as being shared with people in specific settings, such as provider offices, low income housing units, unemployment offices and other community agencies. Presentations and forums will be facilitated with various community groups, agencies and coalitions to foster meaningful discussions around access to healthcare issues. The video will aim to break down misperceptions and encourage better communication from both perspectives. It will be interspersed with narrative that reports on the data for access to care indicators for the region, offering the viewer with tips for navigating the healthcare system, and providing background information on the clients or providers as appropriate.

It is expected that through this project:

- The uninsured will better understand how to obtain health insurance coverage.
- The underinsured will understand how to obtain health services and how to be compliant in order to gain optimal health benefits from these services.
- Providers will understand the barriers the uninsured/underinsured face and will encourage necessary interventions as opposed to discharging.
- The provider and patient will have a better understanding of each other's perspective which may lead to them working in partnership to maintain the patient's wellness.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

PROBLEM STATEMENT:

Barriers exist for both providers and patients that interfere with access to health services and positive health outcomes.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES:

- The development of a resource documentary for use by team members.
- The video will provide viewers with practical tips for navigating the healthcare system.
- The video/documentary will be piloted among the team member's organizations, targeting patients and providers.
- The team will facilitate 5 learning sessions for patients and 5 learning sessions for providers by 07/31/11.
- The team members will distribute the video to 50 provider contacts for use within their practice, agency, or organizations by 07/31/11.
- Individuals in Oneida, Herkimer and Madison County viewing area will be exposed to this issue at hand through viewing sessions and media promotion by 07/31/11.
- A better understanding on the subject of the uninsured/underinsured in Central NY by the team members which will be measured through the use of a pre and post self-evaluation tool.
- Increased understanding by the community and providers of the health care challenges of the uninsured/underinsured/publicly insured. An evaluation tool to measure changes in understanding will be administered after each facilitated viewing session.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

<input type="checkbox"/> NYS Department of Health and NYS Office of Mental Health	<input type="checkbox"/> Coalitions and Partnerships:
<input type="checkbox"/> Foundations:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oneida County Health Coalition/MAPP Advisory Team, Herkimer County HealthNet, Madison County Priorities Council/MAPP Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community Health Foundation of Western and Central NY (CHFVNY), United Way of the Greater Utica Area, Community Foundation	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Health, Mental Health, and Social Service Departments (Oneida Nation, Oneida, Herkimer and Madison Counties)
<input type="checkbox"/> Colleges and Universities (students and faculty):	<input type="checkbox"/> Media:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Utica College, SUNY IT, Harvard University, Hamilton College, Morrisville State University, Herkimer County Community College, Mohawk Valley Community College, Colgate University	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oneida Nation 4 Directions Media, Local television, radio, and newspapers
<input type="checkbox"/> Central NY Health Care Systems	<input type="checkbox"/> County leadership (Oneida, Herkimer and Madison County Executives/Administrators, Legislators and Boards of Supervisors)
<input type="checkbox"/> Medical Societies	<input type="checkbox"/> Community Members:
<input type="checkbox"/> Physicians or other medical providers of under/uninsured	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Medicaid and under/uninsured patients
<input type="checkbox"/> Community and patient advocacy groups	<input type="checkbox"/> Support staff for health facilities
<input type="checkbox"/> Human service providers with connections to Medicaid patients	<input type="checkbox"/> Insurance companies

The project will focus on organizational and public health systems within the tri-county region by seeking to improve provider organizational practices and patient compliance to decrease barriers to care.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

This project will meet the criteria for the LTL program because it addresses a significant community health issue, access to healthcare, for the region. Early results of each county's community health assessment activities indicate that access to care is a priority concern of the community and providers alike. It has been an ongoing issue and is augmented by the current economic climate. Each of the team member organizations have a vested interest in improving access to healthcare from the perspectives of each one's core functions relating to public health and direct care services. The project is novel and would not duplicate existing efforts and has the potential to dovetail with current efforts toward planning for regional

collaborations to address health issues. Successful project development will require outreach to stakeholders and community leaders for support, involvement, promotion, and resources. Effective communication skills will be necessary to clearly define and articulate the project's objective, motivate stakeholders to support the project and secure their buy-in. Leadership opportunities can be found through researching, networking for, and marketing the project. Team members will need to network with project partners and in doing so must sell the project as viable and worthwhile.

Access to quality care is a complex multi-faceted issue with multiple contributing factors. It may be difficult to get providers and patients to speak honestly and/or to appear on camera. There may be additional controversy if patients and providers have negative comments about the other group. The project will stretch team member skills in building trusting relationships, networking, and eliciting honest feedback. In addition, issues surrounding access to quality of care can be sensitive and challenging as identified weaknesses may be perceived as threatening to providers, thus all team members will need to understand and learn how to avoid potential "political landmines" that could derail the project or jeopardize organizational status. The project will require team members to learn and practice strategic-thinking skills necessary to advocate for improving the health and well-being of the community's health while managing the cultural, power, and conflict issues unique to each county and organization. Lastly, overall project management and implementation will require time-management skills to coordinate work-related duties with project activities.