



New England eConsult for Specialty Care Network Launched by Community Health Center, Inc.

Community Health Center, Inc. (CHC), Connecticut's largest primary care provider for the underserved population, headquartered in Middletown, CT, announced today, that it has launched an eConsult network for specialty care. eConsults are clinical consultations between a primary care provider (PCP) and a specialist conveyed electronically via a web-based, HIPAA compliant communications system developed by Safety Net Connect. This New England network came out of a 2-year randomized pilot that CHC, UConn and the Weitzman Institute recently completed for cardiology. An evaluation of the 2-year randomized pilot showed that quality of care was maintained or enhanced while simultaneously achieving substantial cost savings. Most importantly, 69% of the eConsult referrals were resolved without the need for a face-to-face visit with specialists, ultimately delivering better health care services while reducing costs.

"It is wonderful as a primary care provider to have the ability to communicate back and forth with specialists directly, via the eConsult platform. While patients often need to be seen face to face, there are many instances when a primary care provider just needs a specialist to weigh in on a lab result or has a quick question about management," explained Dr. Daren Anderson, Director of the Weitzman Institute and VP/Chief Quality Officer of Community Health Center, Inc. "Now we can reserve those face to face visits for the patients who really need them, and use eConsults for those that don't. We get the answer much more quickly and can get the patients the treatment they need more quickly as well."

Using built-in specialty-specific referral guidelines and decision support, PCPs submit their questions or concerns through the eConsult system along with other relevant information such as chart notes, lab and imaging results. Participating specialists – in this case, specialists at The University of Connecticut Health Center – review and respond with advice regarding diagnosis, treatment, and management for each case. An eConsult may result in a request to send the patient to see the specialist or to order certain tests, but in many cases the eConsults provide the PCP with the necessary recommendation(s) to manage the patient in the primary care setting with no need for a face to face consult. Each of these cases results in improved efficiency and patient care. Target response time for eConsults is within two business days of the eConsult request.

"CHC and Weitzman Institute have taken a leadership approach by ensuring access to high-quality specialty consults, delivered in just days, and all within the patient's medical home," says Chris Cruttenden, President of Safety Net Connect, provider of the eConsult technology. "This team is delivering truly meaningful innovation in patient-centered medical care."

Stemming from the success of the 2-year pilot, CHC received a \$500,000 grant to create the New England eConsult Network (NEECN), which currently links PCPs from Community Health Center, Inc. and Penobscot Community Health Care - Maine's largest federally qualified health center, headquartered in Bangor - to specialists from The University of Connecticut Health Center. Over the course of this year the network will be available to additional private and public practices with varied payer mixes and patient populations.

"In order to practice primary care, we have an obligation to improve primary care. That's why our Weitzman Institute is engaged in projects focused on practice transformation," said Mark Masselli, President and CEO of CHC. "eConsults is just another example of how we are leaders in innovating primary care delivery, not just locally, but on a national level as well."

The program has launched at all Penobscot Community Health Care locations, and at Community Health Center, Inc.'s sites in Groton and New London. CHC will roll out the program to its 11 additional sites over the course of the next 4 months, while closely monitoring its effectiveness, utilization rates and outcomes.

The State Department of Social Security (DSS) allows Medicaid to cover e-consultations. "We are grateful for Commissioner Bremby's leadership and support on this matter, and his recognition of the impact this vital transformative initiative could have on thousands of Connecticut residents," remarked Masselli.

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About Community Health Center, Inc.

Since 1972, Community Health Center, Inc. has been one of the leading healthcare providers in the state of Connecticut, building a world-class primary health care system committed to caring for uninsured and underserved populations. CHC is focused on improving health outcomes for its more than 130,000 patients as well as building healthy communities. Recognized as both a Level 3 Patient-Centered Medical Home by the National Committee for Quality Assurance and a Primary Care Medical Home by The Joint Commission, CHC delivers service in more than 200 locations statewide, offering primary care in medical, dental and behavioral health services. For more information, visit www.chc1.com.

About The Weitzman Institute

The Weitzman Institute is the first community-based research center established by a Federally Qualified Health Center, dedicated to quality improvement and research in primary care for the underserved. The Institute tests promising innovations in primary care delivery and establishes research priorities for Community Health Center, Inc. (CHC). For more information about Weitzman Institute visit <http://weitzmaninstitute.com>.

