



School Health Connection Goes Electronic

Developing a health information management system for New Orleans' school-based health centers

SUMMARY

From February 2008 through April 2011, [School Health Connection](#), a program of the [Louisiana Public Health Institute](#), developed an electronic health information management system for newly established school-based health centers in Greater New Orleans. School Health Connection was established as part of a broader effort to restore community health services and introduce school-based clinics after Hurricane Katrina.

Electronic health information management systems offer the following benefits:

- They provide clinical staff with a method of collecting information and sharing it with centers in the network, other safety-net providers and appropriate school district personnel. Shared information results in better continuity of student care, including early intervention and prevention.
- They provide standardized recordkeeping within the network, which bolsters revenue and system sustainability through integrated and coordinated billing.

To establish an electronic health information management system, staff at the Louisiana Public Health Institute and School Health Connection:

- Established an advisory committee of representatives from 10 school-based health centers. The committee recommended what data should be incorporated into the electronic medical record systems, developed standards for selecting a vendor and screened 15 possible vendors.
- Selected an information technology vendor (eClinicalWorks) based on a competitive process, and developed a secure health information technology infrastructure within and among School Health Connection health centers.
- Trained School Health Connection clinic staff in the new system to ensure that the new information technology would be adopted and diffused throughout the network.

Results

Project Director Gaurav Nagrath, M.B.A., Louisiana Public Health Institute's chief information officer said, "During the grant period, we completed the first critical step toward establishing a community-wide health information system infrastructure for Greater New Orleans' SBHCs." He also reported the following key results:

- School Health Connection procured, instituted and maintained a cross-site, integrated electronic medical record and practice management system at 10 school-based health centers.
- Some 40 doctors, nurses, and social workers who provide primary care at the 10 school-based health centers used the system to understand children's health status and document clinical encounters.
- More than 10,500 patient records were created through the electronic medical record and practice management system. These records documented more than 50,000 patient visits.

Lessons Learned

Nagrath offered the following lessons in an interview:

- Include a strong, on-site software-vendor presence when implementing a health information management system
- Secure the involvement of partners when implementing a new system. Involved partners facilitate staff buy-in
- Require that members of partner organizations be on-site during key project implementation dates
- Develop training methods that successfully address staff turnover

Funding

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) provided a 39-month grant of \$713,763 to support this project.

Afterward

School Health Connection continues to operate and optimize the electronic health record system. With a \$4 million grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (that will last four years) and a \$2 million grant from the GE Foundation (that will last three years), the Louisiana Public Health Institute and School Health Connection will expand school-based services at existing sites to students attending nearby schools, and develop new

school-based centers with electronic medical record systems that link to previously established sites.

Report prepared by: Darl Rastorfer

Reviewed by: Mary Nakashian and Molly McKaughan

Program Officer: Jane Isaacs Lowe

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