

TELEHEALTH IN THE NORTHEAST

FIELD REPORT: SAMPLE STAKEHOLDER CHALLENGES, SOLUTIONS, & LESSONS LEARNED

NORTHEAST TELEHEALTH RESOURCE CENTER (GRANT GA5RH37459)

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QUESTIONS? PLEASE CONTACT DANIELLE LOUDER, PROGRAM DIRECTOR (DLOUDER@MCD.ORG)

MAINEHEALTH AND THEIR MULTI-MODAL APPROACH TO TELEHEALTH IMPLEMENTATION

The Northeast Telehealth Resource Center's 7th annual regional conference went hybrid last month in a model that saw speakers and conference attendees joining both in-person and virtually. Due to the surge in COVID-19 hospitalizations and positivity rates locally and nationwide, the NETRC team had to get creative with the conference structure to ensure safety and comfort for all participants. Presentations and breakout sessions throughout the two-day event featured speakers both on stage and on screen discussing key issues and sharing best practices and lessons learned from a variety of telehealth perspectives, one of which came from the MaineHealth Telehealth Team, who hosted a pre-conference workshop entitled "Implementing Systemic Multi-modal Telehealth Services."

MaineHealth is the largest health care organization in Maine with over 15 locations throughout Maine and northern New Hampshire. The telehealth team at MaineHealth has grown steadily over the past several years in large part due to the procurement of federal grant dollars that have helped expand the program. The team, led by Telehealth Director, Jasmine Bishop, gave a presentation that covered the successes and missteps that eventually led to the implementation of multiple clinical services across patient settings leveraging three telehealth modalities: eConsults, Remote Patient Monitoring and Telemedicine. Topics of focus included how to identify and engage champions at all levels of the organization, the benefits of operational and technical standardization and overcoming common barriers to success.

The team's "sink or swim" approach to sharing their experiences with expanding virtual care both prior to and during the pandemic provided a helpful insight for others that may be exploring similar program implementations. For example, Program Manager Rachel Alfiero shared that as the dermatology eConsult program expanded, they failed to implement a streamlined procurement process for the scopes and devices needed to support it ("sink"). This led to them aligning more closely with their IT team to track and order the hardware necessary to run the service. Whereas Program Manager Michelle Beane shared a success ("swim") story of how they made sure to establish clear clinical goals and outcomes in order to measure the success of their remote patient monitoring program focused on healthy living.

The workshop was rounded out by hearing from the team's clinical lead, Dr. Tracy Jalbuena, who spoke to the importance of building a telehealth quality assurance and quality improvement program. As Dr. Jalbuena stated, "quality is a big deal in healthcare", and due to increased scrutiny, perhaps it is an even bigger deal for telehealth. This portion of the discussion emphasized the necessity of integrating a system's clinical outcomes measures into telehealth visits. Among the possible benefits of this integration is negotiating reimbursement from payers, a critical concern for most organizations.

The Northeast Telehealth Resource Center was delighted to have the MaineHealth Telehealth Team join our incredible cohort of speakers at NETRC 2021. This session encouraged engaged discussion and the information shared will be helpful to health care organizations throughout the region and beyond. A recording of the session is available at www.eventmobi.com/TelehealthLaunchpad2021 (with account creation).

The NETRC team has worked closely with the MaineHealth Telehealth team to support their growth and optimization of their diverse telehealth service lines for years, including 27 unique requests for technical assistance in 2020. Future collaborations with MaineHealth include co-developing a telehealth physical exam training resource, and leveraging subject matter expertise for a regional Project ECHO initiative funded through HRSA.

“The Northeast Telehealth Resource Center provides ongoing telehealth guidance crucial to the success of the MaineHealth Telehealth program. The pandemic created a surge in telehealth utilization across our care settings which, when coupled with a complicated reimbursement and policy landscape, made it difficult to keep track of all the changes. The NETRC team made it possible – they are the ever-present source of truth on all topics telehealth!”
 Jasmine Bishop, MBA - Director, Telehealth

Sample slides presented by MaineHealth on September 23, 2021:




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Top 10 things we learned for implementing eConsults

1. Understand the current landscape in how providers connect with specialists (in-basket messaging, email, phone call, “curbside”)
2. Develop implementation plan
3. Allow for unforeseen conflicts
4. Align with your Telehealth IT partners
5. Lean on your clinical champions in developing the template, though be a part of the discussion
6. Understand the reimbursement landscape
7. Determine how the service will be considered successful
8. Collaborate with other stakeholders who are interested in eConsults, cast your web
9. Align with your partners in ambulatory information services
10. Develop a quality assurance plan post go-live








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Training and Education Sustainability

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Leveraging a “train the trainer” model ✗ Trained a single Medical Assistant ✗ Initially did not consider longer term support of training new staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Identified multiple staff to be trained at first ✓ Created role-specific training videos on cart and EMR utilization ✓ Continued initial training for a site in person, as there was added benefits for relationship management
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Now quality in telehealth is a big deal too

- Volume of telehealth utilization has potential to impact clinical outcomes and other quality measures at scale
- Attention is turning to aligning telehealth metrics with overall metrics
- Above and beyond the typical operational programmatic metrics, how is telehealth performing
 - In patients’ clinical outcomes?
 - In overall system utilization?
 - Financially?









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Top 10 Considerations for Implementing a Hospital Telehealth Program

1. Identify clinical champions and assess department-level buy-in
2. Understand how telemedicine aligns with, and supports, the health system’s/local hospital’s strategic priorities
3. Execute service agreement between originating and distant sites
4. Establish realistic timeline for implementation and set go-live date
5. Assess technology needs – is equipment incompatible (too big or too small, or outdated?)
6. Build relationships with leadership – new CMOs, are CMOs communicating with ED Directors?
7. Familiarize yourself with state licensure laws – (IMLC in ME and NH, not VT or MA)
8. Plan ahead for tasks with long lead times (credentialing)
9. Anticipate provider (un)availability to attend trainings
10. Investment of partners to allocate resources to staffing telehealth services

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