



# Plan, Pilot, and Evaluate

## February 2024 Update

# What is an eConsult?

- **Timely communication hosted on a secure electronic platform that occur asynchronously (at different times) between primary care providers (PCPs), or other healthcare professionals, and specialist providers.**

## Scenario A

### eConsult Occurs; PCP has Follow-Up with Patient

If the case is appropriate for an eConsult, the specialist will answer the clinical question posed by the PCP. The PCP will then have a follow-up appointment with the patient.

## Scenario B

### Patient Completes Face-to-Face Consult with a Specialist

If the case is not appropriate for an eConsult, the specialist recommends that the patient see a specialist face-to-face. Depending on the case, this can occur in-person or using telehealth.



### **PATIENTS**

Decreased travel, fewer unnecessary tests and procedures, improved access to care



### **HEALTH SYSTEMS**

Improved access to speciality care, lower total cost of care, more efficient use of health care resources



### **SPECIALISTS**

Clearer clinical questions, fewer inappropriate visits, reduced disruption in workflow



### **PAYERS**

Reduced costs due to more efficient referrals for specialty care



### **PRIMARY CARE PROVIDERS**

Increased scope of practice, greater dissemination of new medical practice, rapid turnaround



### **CLINICAL OUTCOMES**

Increased use of evidence-based treatment, improved quality of care

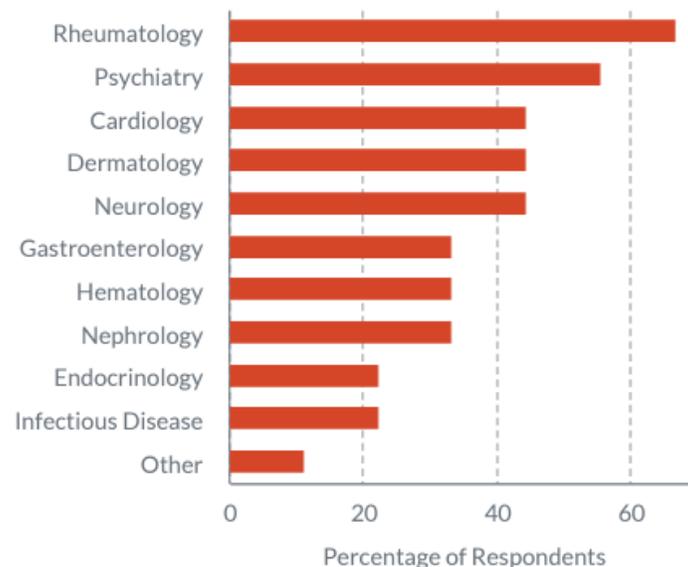
# *Benefits of eConsults*

# Maine eConsult Network: Planning

A planning effort was initiated by MCD Global Health and the Maine Rural Health Collaborative through a one-year **Rural Health Network Development Planning Grant** from the Health Resources and Services Administration. This initiative was supported by subject matter experts, including Penobscot Community Health Care.

## Baseline Assessment, Fall 2020 (12 organizations responding)

### SPECIALTIES OF GREATEST NEED



### PERCEIVED CHALLENGES OF eCONSULT IMPLEMENTATION

	REIMBURSEMENT
	DIFFICULT TO IMPLEMENT WITHOUT GRANT FUNDING
	IDENTIFICATION OF SUITABLE PATIENTS FOR eCONSULT VS. IN-PERSON SPECIALTY VISIT
	COORDINATION WITH ORIGINATING SITE
	USING eCONSULTS TO MAXIMUM CAPACITY

### PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO eCONSULT IMPLEMENTATION

Availability of specialists	Connectivity
Payment	Accessibility
COVID-19	Quality of service
Training of Providers	EHR integration

### PERCEIVED SUCCESSES AFTER eCONSULT IMPLEMENTATION

- Gain specialty care access
- Internal champions
- Support of Weitzman Institute team
- Proven efficacy of eConsult Model
- Partnerships with payers

**"Providers love it - it works really really well. It reduces cost, improves quality, provides education for PCPs via organic experience."**

*Lori Dwyer, CEO  
Penobscot Community Health Care*

MAINE  
**eConsult**  
NETWORK

*Pilot Program*



# Next Steps: Pilot Program

The Maine eConsult Network (MEeCN), with funding from Maine DHHS and facilitated by the Northeast Telehealth Resource Center (NETRC), established a **one-year pilot program to implement and evaluate eConsults** between primary care and specialist clinicians to reduce disparities and improve access to specialty expertise, particularly in rural areas.

# Primary Care Application



## Maine eConsult Network: PCP Pilot Participant Application

The Maine eConsult Network (MEeCN)\*, with funding from Maine DHHS and facilitated by the Northeast Telehealth Resource Center (NETRC), seeks to establish a 1-year pilot program to implement electronic consultations (eConsults) between primary care and specialist clinicians to reduce disparities and improve access to specialty expertise, particularly in rural areas. Electronic consultations, (eConsults), use a web-based system that allows a primary care provider (PCP) and a specialist to securely share health information and electronically communicate about patient care. The provider-to-provider eConsult system reduces the need for unnecessary specialty referrals and physical trips for specialist visits as patient's needs are resolved through the PCP with appropriate input from specialists.

- Estimated time to complete: 25-30 minutes
- Question topics include:
  - Referral patterns
  - Payer Mix
  - Patient Demographics
- Scoring Considerations
  - Need for specialty support
  - Rurality
  - Capacity to serve diverse and high need population
  - Leadership buy-in

**Due date August 12<sup>th</sup>** <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MEeCN>

# Program Goals

Ultimately, the goal of the program is to reduce disparities and improve access to specialty care in Maine, particularly among rural populations. Further, the facilitators and funders of the program hope to:

**Improve  
Patient  
Experience  
and Access  
to Care**

**Support  
Patients  
Needing  
Specialty  
Care**

**Support  
Primary  
Care  
Providers in  
Managing  
Patients**

**Improve  
Payer  
Support of  
eConsults**

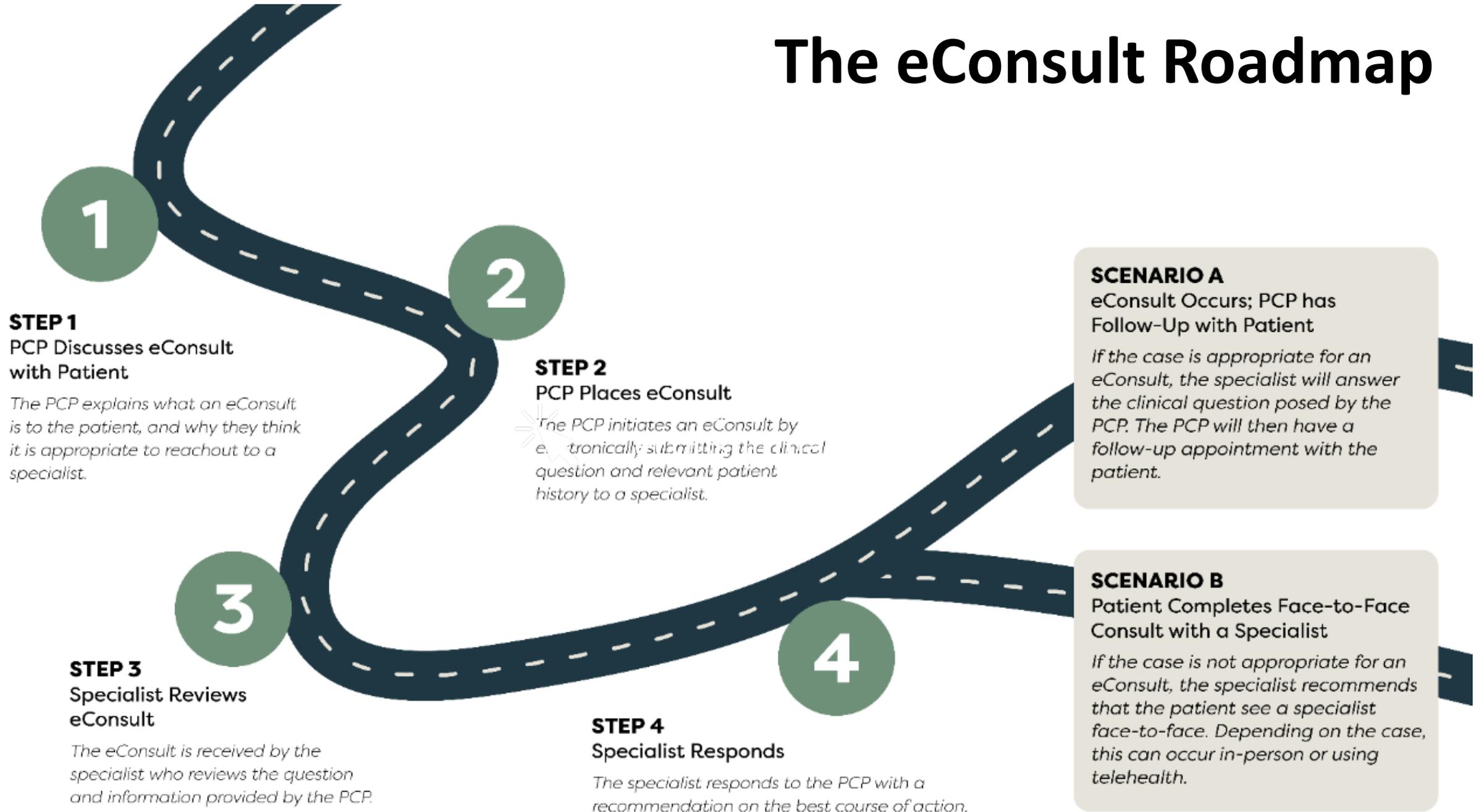
**Reduce the  
Overall  
Cost of  
Care**

*The Maine eConsult Network Pilot  
Program is funded by the Maine  
Department of Health and Human  
Services*



*Learn more about the benefits of eConsults at  
[www.econsultmaine.org](http://www.econsultmaine.org)*

# The eConsult Roadmap



# Benefits of Engagement



## For Our Patients

Timely access to care and early intervention in addressing symptoms will result in better quality of care. Unnecessary in-office visits, including those to the emergency department, will alleviate the financial burden on patients.



## For Our Providers

PCPs who self-manage patients in need of specialty consultation will gain enhanced education and increase their scope of practice. Specialists will experience fewer inappropriate visits and reduced disruption in workflow.

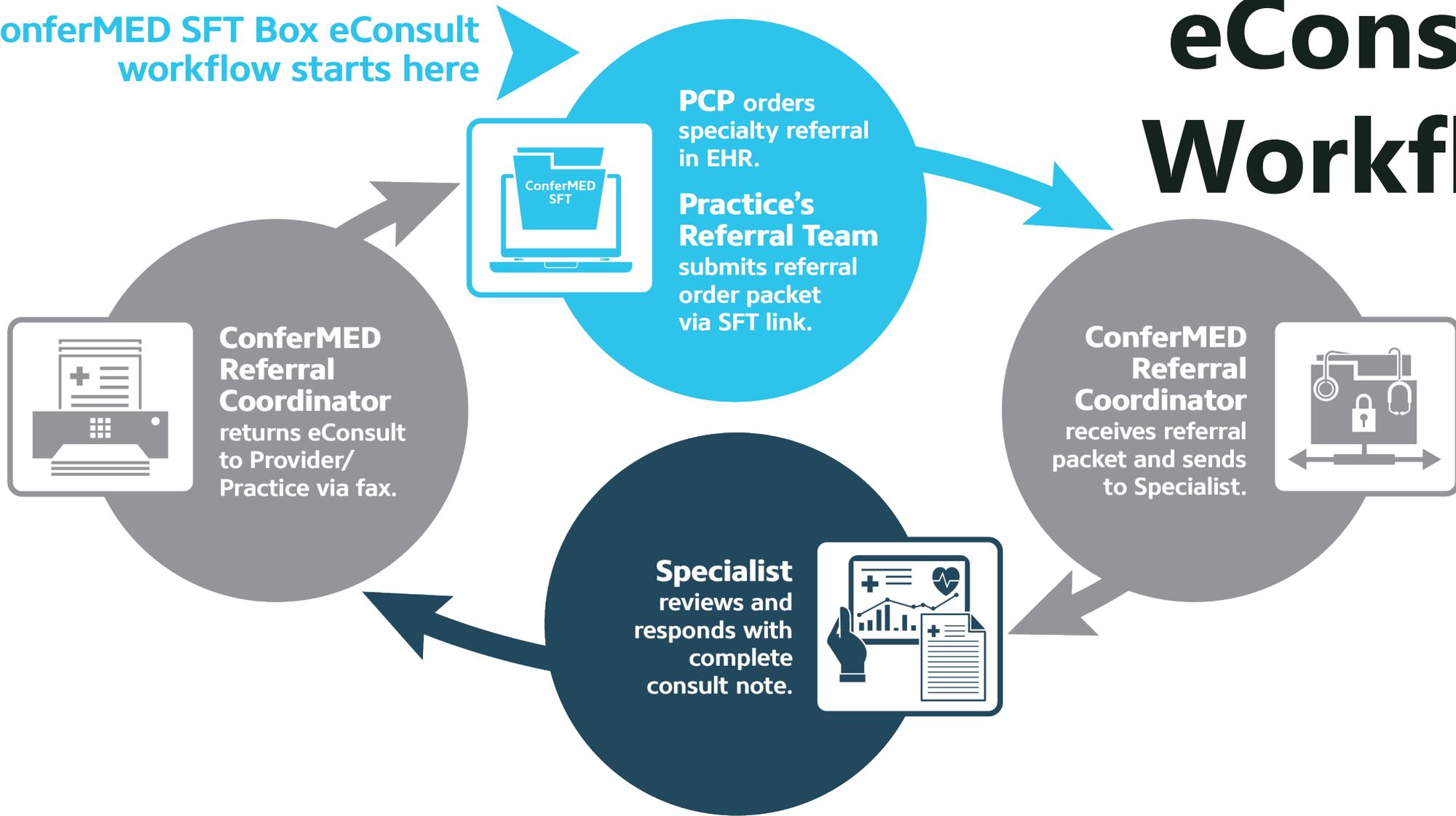


## For Our Organization

Participation in a growing trend in primary care referrals will enhance our organization's market awareness as a trusted resource. Additionally, reimbursement for referral review work will result in financial improvement.

# eConsult Workflow

ConferMED SFT Box eConsult workflow starts here



# Pilot Program Update

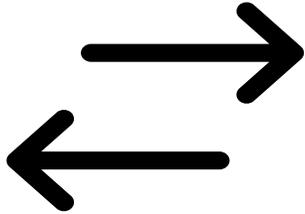
February 1, 2024

- **With funding from Maine DHHS, MCD Global Health facilitated** a one-year pilot program to implement and evaluate eConsults. Data collection ended January 2024.
- MEeCN used the **ConferMED** eConsult platform and their existing specialty network (all consulting providers are licensed in Maine) while we also recruit additional, local specialists.
- Our first eConsult was submitted December 2022.
- Project next steps include a final evaluation report in collaboration with the **Maine Rural Health Research Center** and finalization of the sustainability plan to be published by April 2024.

**More information, including our Implementation Guide, is available at**  
[www.eConsultMaine.org](http://www.eConsultMaine.org)



<b>Pilot Organizations</b>
Fish River Rural Health
Bucksport Regional Health Center
Pines Health Services
St. Joseph Health Care
Penobscot Community Health Center
Mount Desert Island Hospital
Pinnacle Health & Rehab, Sanford
Nasson Health Care



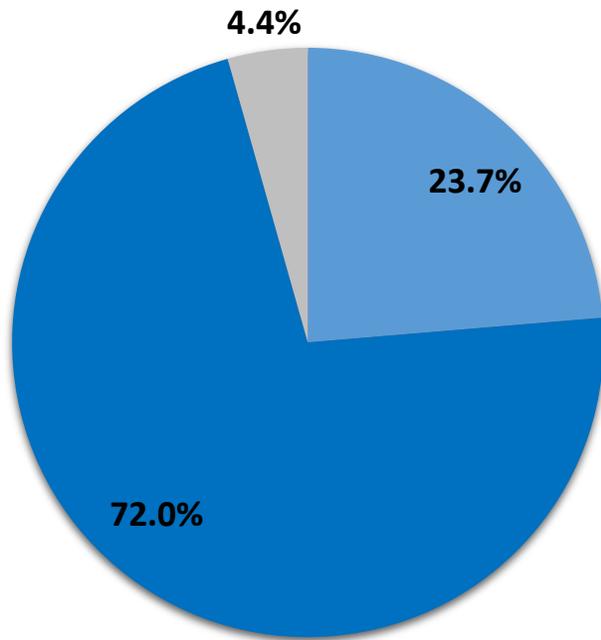
<b>Specialties</b>	
Cardiology	Neurology
Dermatology	Orthopedics
Endocrinology	Pain Medicine
ENT	Psychiatry
Gastroenterology	Pulmonology
Hematology	Rheumatology
Infectious Disease	Urology
Nephrology	Psychiatry for adults with Autism and Dev. Disability

# December 1, 2022 - December 31, 2023

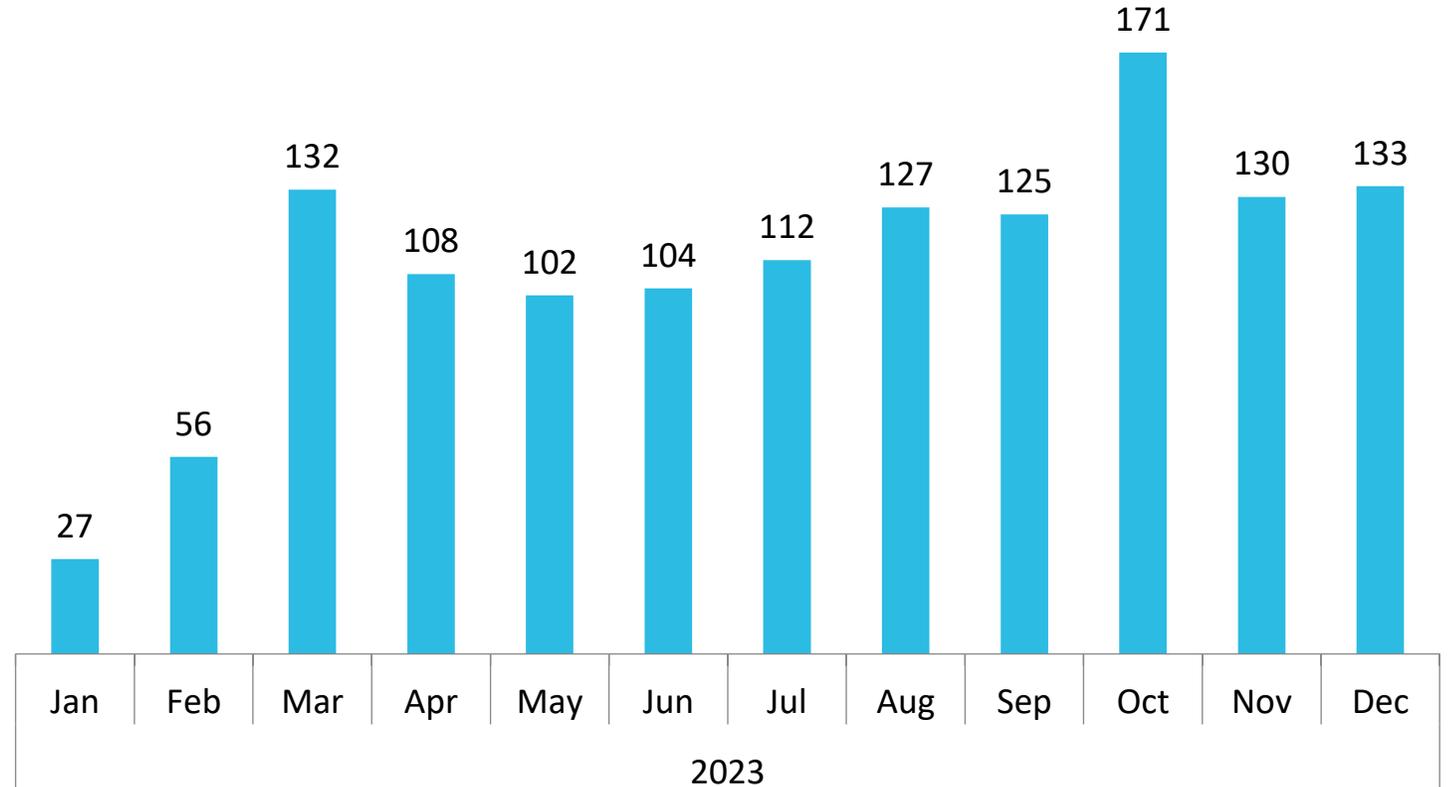
Total = 1327

## Outcomes

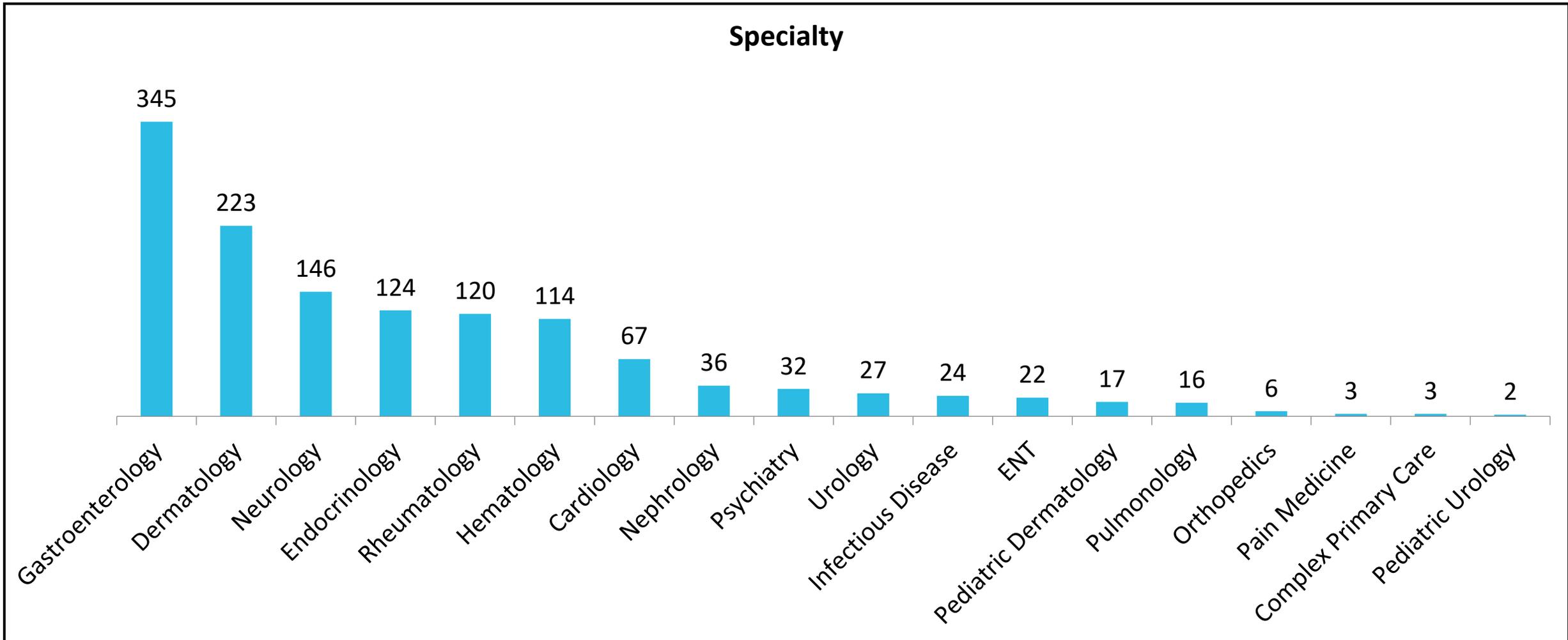
■ F2F ■ Non F2F ■ PCP Workup Recommended



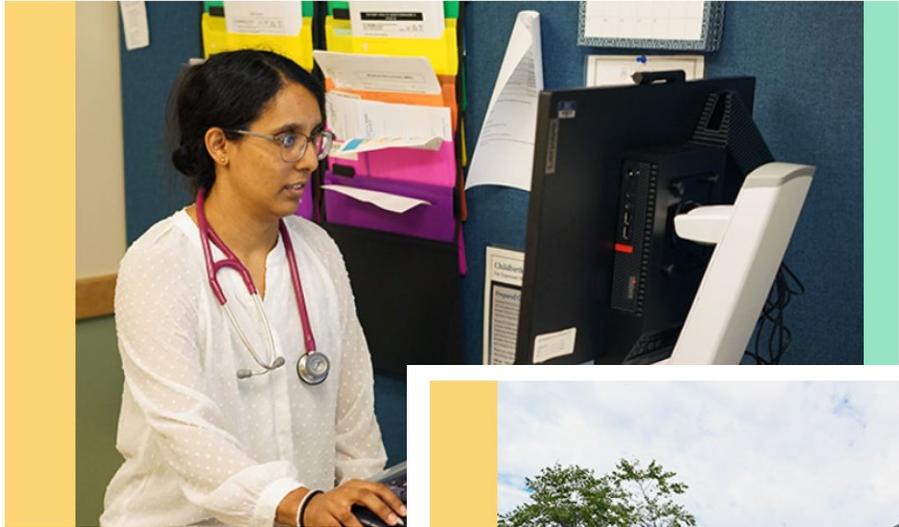
## eConsults Over Time



# December 1, 2022 - December 31, 2023



# Bridging Health Care: Connecting Primary Care and Specialty Care through Technology



## ECONSULTS OFFER A VIRTUAL PLATFORM TO IMPROVE SPECIALIST ACCESS

ANALYSIS | BY ERIC WICKLUND | SEPTEMBER 15, 2023



A pilot program in Maine is proving the value of a telemedicine network that links remote primary care providers with specialists.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- eConsult platforms enable primary care providers to connect with specialists on a telemedicine platform to discuss patient care. The platform allows specialists to determine whether a patient needs an in-person consult or can be treated by the PCP.
- In a pilot program now underway in Maine, 70% of the more than 500 eConsults conducted in the past six months have enabled PCPs to treat the patients themselves, while 25% were scheduled for in-person visits and the other 5% needed more information.
- The program will be discussed during the Northeast Telehealth Resource Center's annual conference next week in Nashua, New Hampshire, which also takes place at the beginning of the American Telemedicine Association's Telehealth Awareness Week.

“ I work on an island, but sometimes, it feels like I’m an island and I don’t have specialty resources. Knowing that I can place this consult and have this conversation with a specialist makes us less isolated and better equipped to serve patients, especially when they otherwise will wait months to learn more. ”



**Natasha Neal, DO, MPH**  
Family Medicine Physician  
*Pilot participant,  
Maine eConsult Network*

“ It is often possible, via eConsults, to get guidance on what tests to order, help interpret results, and recommend medication. These three core functions reduce the amount of time it takes for care plans to be executed, which means more efficient, less expensive care for patients. The face-to-face visit with the specialist, if needed, can be more nuanced and higher value because the patient will be present with relevant testing already performed. ”



**Jennifer Monti, MD,**  
Cardiology Specialist  
*Pilot participant, Maine  
eConsult Network*

# [www.TelehealthClassroom.org](http://www.TelehealthClassroom.org)

- Telehealth Classroom is an **open-access eLearning Portal** developed by the federally funded Northeast Telehealth Resource Center
- Courses available include an **in-depth eConsult toolkit**

The screenshot shows the Telehealth Classroom website interface. At the top, the browser address bar displays "TELEHEALTHCLASSROOM.ORG". The page header includes the "NORTHEAST TELEHEALTH RESOURCE CENTER" logo and the "Telehealth Classroom" title. A navigation sidebar on the left lists "DASHBOARD", "PROFILE", and "COURSES". The main content area features a welcome message: "Welcome to your dashboard, Michaela. Here, you can access all of your resources." Below this, a section titled "COURSES (4 RESULTS)" displays four course cards, each with a "LEARN MORE" button. The courses are:

- SUPPORT for ME Telehealth Toolkit**: This telehealth training and toolkit has been designed by the Northeast Telehealth Resource Center (NETRC) for SUPPORT for ME participants who will be utilizing telehealth to provide Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) services to their patients and clients.
- Telehealth for Primary Care Toolkit**: This interactive course provides an introduction to implementing and optimizing telehealth in primary care. This course was developed by the Northeast Telehealth Resource Center in collaboration with the Bi-State Primary Care Association, Care Transformation Collaborative of Rhode Island, and regional subject matter experts.
- Telehealth Basics for Community Health Workers**: This training is intended for community health workers and other individuals who assist clients in the prevention, management, and self-management of chronic health conditions using technological tools and telehealth. This course is not intended to replace CHW core competency training but is designed to complement and provide community health workers with added education, skill building, and access to resources in aiding their clients with technology and telehealth use.
- NETRC's eConsult Toolkit**: This self-paced course introduces the asynchronous, telehealth modality of eConsults.
- Achieving Quality in Telehealth: Practical Resources for Providers**: This e-Learning module is designed to allow providers to access additional skills and best-practice knowledge to treat patients over video or audio only.

**More information,  
including resources:**  
[www.eConsultMaine.org](http://www.eConsultMaine.org)

### [MEeCN Implementation Guide](#)

This document provides an introduction to the Maine eConsult Network and an overview of eConsults workflows and benefits.

### **Dermatology Resource Hub:**

- **Building on TADA**  
Builds and expands on basic dermoscopy skills .  
Recorded June 2023.
- **Dermatology Update for Primary Care - Part 1**  
Provides an update on dermatology topics for primary care.  
Recorded May 2023.
- **Dermatology Update for Primary Care - Part 2**  
Provides an update on dermatology topics for primary care.  
Recorded May 2023.
- **Dermatology Training: Finding the Scope**  
This is an introduction to dermatology eConsult best practices.  
Recorded March 2023
- **Dermatology Training: The Skinny on Dermoscopy**  
This video provides an in-depth review of dermoscopy.  
Recorded May 2023