Electronic Health Records: What Works in Title X Agencies

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INTRODUCTION

To remain an integral part of health care for low-income women and men, Title X agencies need to determine how to make the transition to electronic health records (EHRs), as well as how to use an EHR to demonstrate high-quality care with improved health outcomes (i.e., Meaningful Use) and participate in the Medicaid EHR Incentive Program.

OBJECTIVES

- Describe different approaches implemented by Title X grantees to adopt EHRs within local contexts
- Identify best practices and lessons learned that other Title X agencies can incorporate into their own EHR planning and implementation

WHO WE TALKED TO

The National Training Center for Management and Systems Improvement (NTC-MSI) conducted a series of interviews with Title X agencies who implemented electronic health records.

- Two non-profit family planning clinics (Region VIII & Region VI)
- A public health department providing a variety of services, including family planning (Region IV)
- A Federally Qualified Health Center (Region VI)
- A Planned Parenthood agency (Region I)

NOTE: The interviews conducted by NTC-MSI included a small sample size and not necessarily representative of all family planning agencies.

LESSONS LEARNED

Preparation
- Seek mentoring from other Title X agencies
- Choose a project leader knowledgeable about technology
- Thoroughly research vendors: “Identify a vendor and product that can meet needs of the agency”
- “Be aware of hidden costs” such as enhancements, maintenance fees and creating family planning-specific templates; understand all potential costs before contracting with the vendor

Implementation
- Train staff early with system
- Conduct a phased implementation of system (i.e., pilot at one site, feature by feature, or department by department)
- Block out time for mock clinics prior to going live; one agency blocked out 4 hours a day for 2 weeks
- When using the EHR system to populate reports, ensure that the correct data elements are being pulled from the system
- “Know that everything will take longer than you expect”

Change Management
- Have an EHR champion; agencies relied on other Title X clinics for support if they did not have it internally
- Communicate frequently with all staff
- Identify messages that resonate; one agency called its EHR implementation its “clinic operations improvement project”
- Expect a “continuum of reactions” to technology from those that feel it is disruptive to those that embrace it

BENEFITS OF EHRs

Health care providers are increasingly switching to EHRs and experiencing the benefits. One agency mentioned, “We saw the benefits of computerizing the system; on the medical care side, the downsides of using paper were glaringly obvious.” Said another, “Practitioners are more aware of how long each patient is spending at each point in the visit or how many patients are waiting.” Major benefits were:

- Ability to Report & Pull Data
- Receive Meaningful Use Incentive
- Third-Party Revenue

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