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Meaningful Guidance Helps Healthcare Providers Reach Meaningful Use in WA and ID with the WIREC Program

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Over the past two years, health reform legislation and the stimulus bill called for the establishment of a number of healthcare-related programs that will require new organizational structures, from accountable care organizations and patient-centered medical homes to health information exchanges. Chartered through the Health Information Technology and Economic Clinical Health (HITECH) provisions of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the Health Information Technology Regional Extension Center (REC) program is an unprecedented effort by the US government to transition paper-based healthcare to electronic health record (EHR) systems. The program's goal is to furnish technical assistance to help healthcare providers select, implement, and meaningfully use certified EHR technology to improve healthcare.

WIREC, the Washington & Idaho REC, illustrates how aligned efforts over the past five years culminate in a region's ability to step up to the challenge.

WIREC is led by Qualis Health, a private, not-for-profit healthcare consulting and quality improvement organization in Washington State. Within the first few months of the program, many practices, comprising nearly 700 physicians, have signed up for the program.

While the REC program is new, it follows related national and local initiatives supported by Qualis Health that make rapid REC implementation possible in our region:

DOQ-IT and the Medicare QIO Program

Qualis Health participated in the Doctor's Office Quality Information Technology (DOQ-IT) initiative between 2005 and 2008. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) launched DOQ-IT to support clinical practices in implementing EHR systems and improving care management.

HISPC and State Initiatives

In 2006, Qualis Health was named as the lead agency by Washington Governor Gregoire to lead the state's collaborative to address privacy and security challenges presented by electronic health information exchanges. With funding from the

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Health Information Security and Privacy Collaboration (HISPC) initiative grew to comprise 42 states and territories.

State Initiatives

Members of the Washington State Health Care Authority created a Health Information Infrastructure Advisory Board (HIIAB) starting in 2006 to "develop a strategy for the adoption and use of electronic medical records and health information technologies that are consistent with emerging standards and promote interoperability of health information systems." Qualis Health's Medical Director for Clinical Informatics was a member of this board, and other Qualis Health employees played key roles in the board's work, which forged many strong working relationships related to Health IT and HIE adoption in the state.

Patient-Centered Medical Home

In 2008, Qualis Health was the recipient of a Commonwealth Fund grant to initiate a demonstration project to help primary care safety net clinics across five states (including Idaho) become

high performing patient-centered medical homes (PCMH). Health IT adoption can be a useful mechanism to deliver PCMH concepts and aligns with CMS Meaningful Use Final Regulations.

Partnerships

In 2005, Qualis Health acquired Outlook Associates, a national consulting organization to help healthcare organizations optimize business and clinical performance through the improvement of operational processes, information, and technology.

In preparation for providing services as a REC, Qualis Health forged a coalition among community organizations across the two-state region. Led by Qualis Health, WIREC's technical assistance is carried out by a consortium of the region's premier health IT adoption organizations: Community Choice Health Network, Idaho Health Data Exchange, Inland Northwest Health Services (INHS), North Idaho Health Network, and PTSO of Washington.

Qualis Health and WIREC also receives support from stakeholder organizations, including state medical and hospital associations, independent physicians associations, and other local and regional organizations.

Implementing WIREC Operations

WIREC's approach has been to offer consulting services to priority primary care providers at no cost for the first project year. Priority providers include those in smaller physician offices, Community Health Centers, Rural Health Clin-

ics, ambulatory facilities affiliated with Critical Access Hospital and Rural Hospitals, and those that predominately serve uninsured and underinsured populations. Initial experience with these providers indicated a need for affordable EHR technical assistance services.

WIREC has three overlapping technical service deployment strategies:

1. **On-the-ground health IT consultants** for one-on-one, customized technical assistance.
2. **Networked IT communities of practice** for sharing learning.
3. **Peer-to-peer networking activities** for the sharing of experience.

Recognizing the relationship between successful technology adoption and workflow, we support workflow process redesign for all providers enrolled in the WIREC as a core strategy for reaching EHR meaningful use. Additionally, our consultant team consists of highly competent members with a wide variety of skills. WIREC Consultants have expertise in a variety of health IT topics, including two providers who have served as clinical champions in major HIT implementation. Team members include those with clinical backgrounds, technical skills, and health IT analytic skills, providing an intimate understanding of the challenges practitioners face when implementing technology while providing care to patients.

The WIREC consulting team has begun providing educational programs and direct assistance in the field to participating practices, and

initial survey results suggest that providers are finding value in the service.

Conclusion

Qualis Health's experience indicates that successful implementation of the REC program is a product of a years-long aligned strategies and initiatives that cultivated the necessary experience, relationships, and expertise. We look forward to continuing to build meaningful relationships with those who have already enrolled in the program, and welcome those who are considering taking advantage of our EHR expertise and resources to improve healthcare on a national level.

For more information, visit www.wirecQH.org

Dr. Evans serves as the Director of the Washington & Idaho Regional Extension Center (WIREC), Qualis Health. The Regional Extension Center program is a national effort focused on assisting primary care providers with selecting, successfully implementing, and meaningfully using certified EHR technology to improve the quality and value of healthcare. She has extensive experience with health IT adoption particularly in small physician practices, process redesign, and healthcare quality improvement. She earned her PhD in Social Psychology from Michigan State University.

Dr. Hummel is the WIREC medical director and has worked over 30 years as a primary care internist in Washington and Idaho—from a solo practice in Moscow, Idaho to over a decade at Group Health, and most recently in an urban practice with the University of Washington.

He has a Masters Degree in Health Services and has worked as Medical Director of MEDEX Northwest, the Physician Assistant training program at the UW. His informatics background includes 12 years

of EHR use in clinical practice and five years as the Associate Medical Director for Informatics and Clinical Improvement at the UW Medicine Neighborhood Clinics. He has also served as Medical Di-

rector for several small healthcare technology companies in Seattle including NexCura, and Deep Domain, Inc. He has been the Medical Director for Clinical Informatics at Qualis Health since 2005.

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