

MEMBER BULLETIN NO. 3

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LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE BRIDGES TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROJECT

Goals of the project

Bay Rivers Telehealth Alliance (BRTA) received HRSA Telehealth Network Program Grant funding from 2012-2015 for its *Bridges to Behavioral Health-Geriatric Psychiatry and Behavioral Health in Rural Nursing Homes* project in the Northern Neck, Eastern Shore, and Middle Peninsula of Virginia. The project goals were to:

1. Increase access to behavioral health services for adults age 45+ diagnosed with behavioral health disorders, dementia, depression, anxiety, delirium and other cognitive and neurological disorders.
2. Improve and expand the training of mental health care providers.
3. Expand and improve the amount of mental health information available to providers, patients, and their families.

Project partners

The Bridges to Behavioral Health project partners included BRTA, Riverside Health System, the Alzheimer's Association Greater Richmond and Southeast Virginia chapters, the William and Mary Raymond A. Mason School of Business and five rural nursing homes.

Project achievements

- ✓ 1,949 geriatric psychiatry consultations with residents of the five rural nursing homes, a substantial increase on their access to mental health services prior to the project.
- ✓ 920 residents of rural nursing homes received an average of 1.7 visits with a geriatric psychiatrist over the 4 years.
- ✓ 400+ Jabber licenses issued to Riverside Health System staff and others involved with the project.
- ✓ 278 interdisciplinary staff members of 14 nursing homes received a 6-module live training on dementia delivered by the Alzheimer's Association.
- ✓ 74 project participants completed a Telehealth Certification.
- ✓ 4 project participants completed a certification to lead the STAR curriculum training.
- ✓ 1 assessment of mental health resources in the service area completed and disseminated.

Project impact

- ✓ 3,658 telehealth visits – 42% of total visits by a geriatric psychiatrist
- ✓ Of the total visits:
 - ✓ 1,851 psychiatry visits
 - ✓ 229 neurology visits
 - ✓ 1,015 pulmonology visits
 - ✓ 465 diabetic retinopathy screenings
- ✓ 302,532 miles of patient travel saved since 2013
- ✓ Nursing home staff reported increased skill as a result of the 6-module dementia training
- ✓ 68% of families and 77% of nursing homes residents were satisfied overall with their telehealth care
- ✓ Large return on investment (100% over 5 years) and high internal rate of return due to favorable impacts on indirect revenues (an additional \$127 per visit, resulting from increased capacity for services due to fewer hospital admissions, fewer emergency department visits, and greater MD time)

Lessons learned

The following benefits and challenges were observed during the project:

BENEFITS

- ☑ Reduction in healthcare access disparities related to geriatric psychiatry, neurology, and behavioral health services
- ☑ Deepened hub and spoke site relationships, including use of telemedicine equipment to hold interdisciplinary team meetings and care transitions hand-offs
- ☑ Strengthened community and network partner relationships, including between distant divisions of a regional health system and between different health systems operating in the region
- ☑ Easier and more frequent access to clinicians enabled earlier and more effective problem solving at a pre-crisis level, including medication management and behavioral interventions

CHALLENGES

- ☒ Changing the referral pattern required additional communication between project partners
- ☒ Accessing the telemedicine carts was difficult for residents who were unable to get to a central room for the consultation (bedside care using iPad was piloted as a solution)
- ☒ Delivering physical exams via telemedicine required new learning, including appropriate video etiquette. Provider liaison and IT staff were integral supports in this process
- ☒ Staff work processes had to be adjusted to meet the need for information transference and differing roles as patient presenters

Sustainability

- ✓ Funding was identified to continue the Alzheimer's Association dementia training
- ✓ Ownership of all equipment purchased and placed at partner sites was transferred to those providers who agreed to take on the licenses
- ✓ BRTA has worked with the Telemedicine directors at Riverside and VCU Health systems to ensure that all eligible reimbursements are requested, including facility fees
- ✓ BRTA will seek future grant funding to support and expand telehealth in rural nursing homes