

News & Announcements

The Efficient Visit

by Sallie Neillie, Executive Director

When a patient is referred to a medical specialist and providing their essential information (at the time of referral), it is important for coordinated patient care. When the specialist physician is donating his/her time, it becomes even more essential.

Project Access knows it is vital to use the donated services of participating clinicians and health care systems wisely. To create an "efficient visit" guideline, we interviewed multiple specialists in our highest demand specialties, including dermatology,

gastroenterology, general surgery, hand surgery, ophthalmology and orthopedics. We asked them to identify the specific information they are looking for in a referral, tell us what kind of x-rays, lab tests or other ancillary services are required. The specialists were unanimous in wanting well-written referrals with strong supporting documentation. If the primary care provider has a probable diagnosis, the specialist would like to know that. In addition, if the primary care provider is aware of other variables the specialist would like to know that as well.

As a result of what we learned from these interviews, we will be piloting a tool for primary care providers and referral coordinator to use later this year. This tool may take one of two shapes as we move forward. We are exploring a small laminated card designed to be worn with a provider's ID badge. It will provide at-a-glance information on any tests, prescriptions or services required before a specialist appointment. The pocket tool will also list administrative information required for all patients sent to us. We are also exploring the possibility of working with the electronic medical record vendor of a number of the community clinics to provide a pull down menu of tests, prescriptions, services required. In either option, Project Access case managers will then work with the patient to ensure that any necessary tests are completed BEFORE the specialist appointment.

Since Project Access began in 2006, almost 6000 patients have been served and nearly 90% of them successfully complete an appointment

with a volunteer specialist. When we began approximately 42% of patients were successful in seeing a specialist. Our unique case management services help ensure that the patients make and keep their appointment. As a result of all of these efforts, this work has resulted in an impressively low no-show rate of 4.8%.

The new tool will help ensure that specialist physicians get the information they need in a timely and efficient manner and will help encourage ongoing dialogue between the primary care safety net providers and the Project Access volunteer specialists. ■

