

Pathways: A system designed to produce positive outcomes and impact health disparities

Background

- The Community Health Access Project “provides a recognized model of community-based care coordination as a means of improving the basic health and social outcomes of individuals in neighborhoods with the greatest needs.” (<http://www.chap-ohio.net/about.asp>)
- Care coordination is facilitated by Community Health Workers (CHWs) who are recruited from the targeted neighborhoods they will serve.
- CHWs work with patients to achieve a specific medical intervention while addressing the social and/or cultural factors affecting the possibility of a positive outcome.
Example: A pregnant teenager with unsafe housing, no phone, no transportation, no insurance or medical provider is in need of multiple services in order to achieve the outcome of appropriate prenatal care.
- CHAP utilizes the Pathways Model, developed by Drs. Mark and Sarah Redding, as a means of tracking interventions and improving accountability towards positive measurable changes in patients' lives.

Building a Pathway

- In order to foster accountability to achieving patient outcomes, the Pathways system connects activities to outcomes.
- Rather than focusing only on activities such as a lab test, a doctor's visit, or a home visit, which may or may not have a positive outcome, activities are built into a Pathway as steps leading towards a positive outcome.
- Pathways are designed to address high priority community problems identified through evaluation of data and community input.
- Pathways are built from the bottom up or, in other words, from the Completion Step or outcome.
- A Completion Step must be a measurable variable and must represent the successful resolution of the problem.
Example: Pregnancy Pathway Completion Step = Baby must be viable and weigh at least 2500 grams at birth.
- After the Completion Step is defined, the problem the Pathway will address and the target population can be defined and incorporated into an Initiation Step.
Example: Health Insurance Pathway Initiation Step = All children <21 years old and expectant mothers in target area who need insurance

Evaluation

- Evaluation is simple with the Pathways model and only requires that the number of completed Pathways be counted
Example: If a hospital needs to track how many patients without a medical home have been successfully engaged with a medical provider, the completed Medical Home Pathways would be counted, in this case counting the completion step of kept appointment with a provider.
- Pathways can also be evaluated to identify barriers to reaching outcomes.
- Barriers can be addressed not only with the patient but also at a community level toward resolution and pathway completion.
- A sum of individual outcomes can be evaluated to measure the impact on health disparities.

Results

- An increase in outcome production has been demonstrated for each of the six key Pathways that CHAP studied.
- The success of the program has led to program replication in five Ohio communities with the support of a Federal Health Community Access Program (HCAP) grant.
- CHW certification was legislatively credentialed in 2003, recognizing the value of the role and achieving professional status for CHWs.
- Contracts with the Departments of Jobs and Family Services in two Ohio counties have also been established in order to reimburse CHAP for completed pathways.

Potential

- It is possible for “health and social systems...to initiate change and reduce disparities if financing/funding is linked not to a step in the process but a documentable outcome” (Pathways Concept, p. 5).
- By focusing on positive preventive health and social outcomes in the underserved communities most at risk, “the Pathways process can significantly improve the health and overall strength of our communities and, at the same time save significant resources through prevention of catastrophic outcomes” (Pathways Concept, p. 6).

References: Pathways: Building a community outcome (no date). <http://www.chap-ohio.net/documents/PathwaysManual.pdf> and Pathways Concept (2001). <http://www.chap-ohio.net/documents/pathways.pdf>