

The Development of the FMEC Super Utilizer Learning Community

A pilot program in Camden, N.J., successfully reduced emergency department admissions and costs by targeting a small number of patients responsible for "racking up huge medical bills and straining already crowded" EDs. Established by the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers, the program first examined ED use citywide and identified frequent ED users. These "super users" typically have complex health problems and do not have the financial or emotional means to fill prescriptions or make doctor appointments.

A team led by Jeffery Brenner, MD, a Family Physician and professor at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey's Robert Wood Johnson Medical School who came up with the idea for the pilot program, intervened in the lives of 35 patients who together accounted for \$1.2 million in hospital charges each month. As a result of the intervention, which included the services of a nurse practitioner, a social worker and a community health worker, the average number of hospital and ED visits each month for the 35 patients dropped from 61 to 37, and total hospital charges were reduced to \$531,000. Funding for the pilot project came from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

In 2009, the FMEC learned of Dr. Brenner's innovative work and invited him to the 2010 FMEC Innovators Network. Before Dr. Atul Gawande wrote about the "*Hotspotter*" in the New York Magazine, Dr. Brenner shared his work with Family Physicians across the northeast region of the US. Quickly a group of Family Medicine Residency programs came together to receive coaching from Dr. Brenner. The FMEC Super-Utilizer Learning Community was born.

At the present the following organizations meet monthly in telephone meetings to discuss their plans to implement and evaluate their respective Super-Utilizer projects. The following organizations are currently involved:

- Cleveland MetroHealth, Cleveland OH
- Cox Health Family Medicine Residency, Springfield, MO
- Crozer Keystone Family Medicine Residency, Springfield, PA
- Jamaica Hospital Medical Center, Family Medicine Residency, Queens, NY
- Lancaster General Hospital, Lancaster, PA
- MedStar Health Family Medicine Residency, Baltimore, MD
- Wellspan Health, York, PA

The Learning Community met for their first face to face meeting at the 2012 FMEC Northeast Region meeting in Cleveland, OH. The challenge of redesigning their respective hospital based systems so that they improved outreach and service to the complex patients with their complex conditions in a cost effective way was apparent.

Each of the Learning Community members is implementing the principles developed by Dr. Brenner in a creative way. One of the Learning Community members has developed a Super Utilizer Fellowship program in which two Family Physicians are learning the organizational development, population health and clinical skills needed to lead this type of intervention. The fellowship graduates will be in great demand as health systems move toward accountable care models.

Each of the Learning Community members is learning how to market their program internally to their hospital/health system leadership and externally to local media and payers introducing in reducing the costs of health services. One of the Learning Community members recently reported that their project has been approached by their county Medicaid office with a proposal to ramp up the size of the population they will serve from 45 patients to 450 patients.

This is an exciting time to be involved in this work. It's an exciting time to think broadly and deeply about redesigning the health care delivery system in a community so that it better serves the people.

For more information: Laurence Bauer, MSW, MEd

laurence.bauer@fmec.net