



Health Center Oral Health Program Promising Practice

Submitted By: Community Health Center of Franklin County

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Establishing a Dental Clinic in a Hospital Emergency Department

Organization:

Community Health Center of Franklin County

Summary:

Community Health Center (CHC) of Franklin County in Massachusetts has established a dental clinic in a hospital emergency department as an emergency room diversion strategy for patients experiencing dental problems. Franklin County in Massachusetts struggles with a shortage of dental providers for MassHealth (Massachusetts Medicaid) recipients. Being the only adult dental provider for MassHealth in the county, many patients were going without dental care. Instead, they would go to the emergency department (ED) as a source for dental treatment. At the time, the best the ED staff could do was prescribe antibiotics and/or pain medications. This is only a short-term solution and would result in the recurrence of patients going back to the ED with the same emergency and infection without definitive treatment from a dentist.

In response to this issue, CHC of Franklin County collaborated with Baystate Franklin Medical Center (BFMC), an 89-bed community hospital in Greenfield. CHC of Franklin County used the 2016 Health Resources and Services Administration Oral Health Service Expansion funding to create a two-chair dental operatory at BFMC. CHC of Franklin County renovated a conference room and small office that is adjacent to BFMC's ED. The funding was used to remove carpet, paint the rooms, and build a small dividing wall to create two treatment areas. Additionally, they outfitted the small office with a desk for reception and five chairs for a waiting area. The program uses portable dental equipment and a NOMAD portable x-ray unit. The dental clinic is equipped with laptop computers and a small server that allows the dental staff to access the main clinic's electronic dental record through a virtual network connection. CHC of Franklin County uses Dentrix as their electronic dental record. The program developed protocols and processes for referral, infection control, emergency management and more. All these protocols and processes were then vetted and approved by BFMC's infection control and quality departments. The program took about 90 days to establish.

Currently, the clinic is open Sunday through Thursday. There is one dentist, one dental assistant, and one patient services coordinator. The dentist provides services like limited and comprehensive exams, restorative care, and simple extractions. For more intensive treatment, preventive services, and follow-up care, patients are referred to CHC of Franklin County's main site which is only three miles away. The patient care coordinator is able to schedule appointments at the main site directly from BFMC. Additionally, the patient care coordinator helps to navigate the patient's dental insurance, including MassHealth.

The dental clinic at the hospital has both scheduled and walk-in care. CHC of Franklin County incorporates pre-scheduled appointments to ensure that the clinic has consistent revenue rather than rely solely on walk-in appointments. If a patient is seen in the ED and has dental concerns, the ED staff completes a warm hand-off to the dental clinic. The dental clinic is able to see the patient the same day for treatment. Scheduled appointments are in the middle of the day with walk-ins in the morning and towards the end of the day. However, if a walk-in patient comes in during scheduled appointments, the dentist is still able to accommodate the patient. When the dental clinic at BFMC is closed, the ED staff completes a referral form and faxes it to the BFMC dental clinic. The patient care coordinator then calls the patient directly to schedule an appointment. If the dental clinic is open the next day, though, the patient is able to come back for walk-in services.

With the onsite dental clinic, the ED has been able to reduce their pain medication and antibiotic prescriptions. If a patient presents with dental-related issues at the ED, the ED providers are able to complete warm hand-offs to the dental clinic. If the dental clinic is closed but open the next day, the ED providers will not provide prescriptions and instead have them return the next day to the dental clinic. The patients have been appreciative and receptive to the dental clinic in BFMC due to the convenience of walk-in care. Many patients have now learned of this program and will immediately seek care at the dental clinic rather than go to the ED. The clinical staff at the ED were essential in developing this program. The Chief of the Emergency Room and nursing director were champions for the project.

The program has been running for three years now and has been very sustainable. The dental clinic at BFMC is the most profitable dental site for CHC of Franklin County due to low overhead. CHC of Franklin County leases the rooms from BFMC at a low cost because the rooms are small. The dental clinic at BFMC is still able to bill services in the same way as the main site. In 2018, the dentist at BFMC completed 1,748 visits for 958 unique patients. For other community health centers considering an ED diversion program like this, CHC of Franklin County encourages adequate time for planning such as identifying partnerships and space for the dental clinic. Also, regular communication with the dental team at the satellite site is vital. CHC of Franklin County has monthly meetings with the BFMC dental team to ensure quality care. CHC of Franklin County hopes to replicate this program in the future due to its success and sustainability.

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