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News

City clinicians take part in unique 'telehealth' program on chronic pain

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STAFF REPORT

Community Health Center, Inc., based in Middletown, launched a national "telehealth" program Thursday, linking health care clinicians in Connecticut and Arizona with one of the nation's leading chronic pain management facilities.

Clinicians working in CHC's primary care sites around Connecticut including New Britain's Washington Square site were linked via video conferencing to pain management experts at a health center in Arizona for the first of what will be weekly consultations aimed at improving management for patients suffering from chronic pain.

In a first-of-its-kind health center-based program, CHC is partnering with Integrated Pain Center of Arizona to mine their expertise in providing evidence-based, holistic, patient-centered treatment for chronic pain.

According to recent statistics from the Centers for Disease Control, one in six Americans (50 million people) experiences some kind of chronic pain during the year, and the majority will seek treatment in a primary-care center such as CHCI. Studies show that chronic pain costs the nation 50 million lost days of work, 750 thousand hospitalizations per year and increased incidents of depression and prescription drug abuse.

Modeled after CHC's successful Project ECHO telehealth program for Hepatitis C and HIV, Dr. Daren Anderson, vice president, chief quality officer at Community Health Center, Inc., and his team developed Project Next Steps — Project ECHO for Chronic Pain Management with the idea that effective chronic pain management requires expertise from a variety of disciplines.

"There is no single approach to managing chronic pain," Anderson said. "This format will bring together experts in pharmacology, behavioral health, primary care and alternative therapies, offering myriad solutions to this complex issue, based on the needs of each individual patient — and the broad range of expertise from multiple clinicians."

"The expectation is that with ECHO the PCP will have the ability to meet all their patient's needs for effective pain management, without having to send them on to other pain specialist," said Dr. Bennet Davis, president of Integrated Pain Center of Arizona. "Specialists are often in short supply, or cannot be easily accessed by patients who are uninsured or underinsured."

If successful, Project ECHO for Chronic Pain Management could decrease utilization of specialty referral services, surgery, imaging and other laboratory services, excessive or inappropriate medication prescribing, and emergency room visits for pain complaints, among others.

The Project ECHO for Chronic Pain Management Telehealth Program is funded in part by grants from the Pfizer Foundation, the Mayday Fund, the Cox Foundation, and The Wallace Research Foundation.

Since 1972, Community Health Center, Inc. has been one of the leading health care providers in the state, building a world-class primary health care system committed to caring for uninsured and underserved populations. For more information, visit www.chc1.com.

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