Weitzman Institute Supports California’s Effort to Address Substance Abuse

The opioid epidemic is a gruesome reality shattering families and communities nationwide. It’s been a high priority for U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy, governors, mayors, philanthropic organizations, and everyone providing health care across the U.S. California has been a national hub for innovation, investing resources to improve care. The California Healthcare Foundation (CHCF) and Center for Care Innovations (CCI) has partnered with the Weitzman Institute to improve access to medication assisted treatment in primary care using its evidence-based telemedicine program.

Last November, Weitzman launched a new Weitzman ECHO Buprenorphine for 14 health centers across the state of California. Weitzman ECHO Buprenorphine, a monthly teleconference that connects primary care providers and their teams with a multi-disciplinary team of faculty members, began in 2013 as a way to disseminate the knowledge and experience gained from CHC’s 10-plus years of experience providing buprenorphine maintenance therapy to patients in the primary care setting. Since then, Weitzman ECHO Buprenorphine has been provided to more than 20,000 health care and medical providers through the CHC’s Treating Addiction in the Primary Care Safety Net Program, which offers assistance to 24 HRSA Substance Abuse Service Expansion grant recipients in California. As in many states across the U.S., the rates of opioid abuse or dependence in California far outweigh the available resources for medication assisted treatment. In 2012, the rate of people with opioid addiction or dependence in California was more than double its buprenorphine treatment capacity. Weitzman ECHO plays a vital role helping these 14 health centers decrease this treatment disparity and expand the access to treatment by incorporating medication assisted treatment programs into their primary care clinics, adds Erickson.

For Weitzman ECHO Buprenorphine-California participants, the case-based learning aspect has proven useful to providers as they navigate the complicated practice of treating patients with substance use disorder. As one ECHO participant from one of the health centers points out, Weitzman ECHO “has been a great way for us to gather insight on what other clinics are doing and, in some way, to reassure ourselves that the challenges we face with certain patients are not isolated.”

Weitzman Institute Offers Comprehensive Tools to Combat the Opioid Epidemic

As the nation grapples with the heroin and prescription drug abuse epidemic and its related avoidable deaths, the Weitzman Institute is promoting awareness of its tools that have proven effective in training and supporting providers on the front lines of the crisis. The tools, which were developed by Community Health Center, Inc. and the Weitzman Institute, were designed for primary care providers by primary care providers to help practices improve patient care and outcomes.

With nearly $1 billion in grants available from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to increase access to treatment for opioid use disorder, we want eligible state agencies to realize there are effective, evidence-based solutions available and ready to be implemented immediately to support frontline providers treating pain and opioid addiction, “says Daren Anderson, MD, director of the Weitzman Institute, and vice president and chief quality officer for CHC.

The Weitzman Institute offers a Project ECHO virtual clinic that brings support and education to providers, enabling them to more effectively manage complex pain cases and to help prescribers of buprenorphine care and expand medication assisted treatment for patients. The Project ECHO clinic is complemented by an eConsult platform that allows providers to submit consult questions directly to board-certified specialists via a secure, HIPAA-compliant messaging platform similar to email. In addition, flexible online-learning communities offer providers and care teams 24/7 access to tools and learning resources and enable them to collaborate with peers and specialists from across the country. CHC’s Weitzman Institute has successfully applied these interventions and supported more than 248 providers caring for patients at 206 practices sites from 25 states across the U.S., according to Agi Erickson, director of Project ECHO.

To learn more about Weitzman Institute services and how they can help states combat the national opioid epidemic, visit http://www.weitzmainstitute.org/sites/default/files/CHC_WI_PainPCPSupToote_F030216web.pdf.

The LGBT Initiative

The year-long initiative focused on helping the health centers identify LGBT people so they could receive appropriate health screenings and other health and wellness interventions. The work was funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and led in partnership by the National Association of Community Health Centers, the Fenway Institute Project ECHO’s Project, and the Weitzman Institute. The staff for the Center for Key Populations at Community Health Centers, Inc. led system change for CHC as one of the 10 participating teams.

The initiative launched in March 2016 with 10 sites and one provider champion with limited information on the sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) on patients over age 13. By January 2017, there were 316 providers gathering data from 70 sites. In March 2016, the combined health centers had SOGI information on 3,584 or 4.6 percent of their patients. By January 2017, they had information on 165,324 patients or 50 percent.

“I wasn’t really expecting this level of change,” says Wanda Montalvo, PhD, associate director of the Weitzman Institute and principal investigator for the project.
Introducing the Research Team at the Weitzman Institute

People are often confused about the difference between research and quality improvement. The following definitions may be helpful:

Research: A systematic investigation, including research development, objective testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge.

Quality Improvement: A process by which individuals work together to improve systems and processes with the intention to improve outcomes.

The Research Team at Weitzman Institute includes team members with diverse areas of expertise and experience in the following areas:

• Health services, including public health, health disparities, patient education and outreach, medically underserved populations
• Women’s health
• Research with pediatric patients
• Behavioral health research
• Research design
• Data management and analysis
• Qualitative research
• Electronic medical records
• Telemedicine and telehealth
• Integration of quality improvement techniques into provider workflows

The Weitzman research team is growing its collaborative relationships with several CHC staff members to work on grant-funded research projects (e.g., Trauma and Diabetes Integrated Care Model, the Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority, Technology Enhanced Access to Comprehensive Healthcare and Buprenorphine Maintenance Therapy).

Research associates and research assistants are engaged in research and a few quality improvement projects that support CHC’s staff and agency priorities, as well as projects that provide technical assistance and services to organizations outside of CHC that share the organization’s vision of improving primary care for medically underserved populations.

Weitzman research associates, often prepared at the Master’s level, are responsible for the execution of a range of research projects and participate in research development activities such as preparation and submission of grant proposals. Core duties include:

• Project management
• Monitoring IRB protocols to ensure compliance with research ethics principles
• Providing input on strategies for research study design and execution
• Data management and analysis
• Manuscript development

Research assistants, prepared at a minimum at the Bachelor’s level, are responsible for a range of research support tasks, including:

• Literature reviews
• Maintaining IRB protocol approval for current research studies
• Obtaining informed consent from research participants
• Creation and administration of research surveys
• Organizing focus groups and conducting chart reviews

Research assistants may also contribute to data management and analysis and participate in manuscript preparation and submission.

Research technicians, prepared either at the Associate’s or Bachelor’s level, provide support for the execution of the national NIH All of Us® Research Program (see next page).

Meetings are being planned with Pod D in Meriden to obtain their feedback and brainstorm around similar concepts.

The LGBT Initiative

“I think our success comes from combining the education and training of providers with concurrent quality improvement efforts focused on care delivery systems,” says Montalvo. “Asking clinicians and support staff to change heteronormative assumptions and ask the SOGI of their adult patients is not easy. However, normalizing SOGI and creating affirming environments for LGBT people will rectify inequities in care delivery and close the health disparity gaps.”

EHR vendors can help health centers by ensuring the proper SOGI fields are part of the patient record along with fields to reflect the proper nouns and pronouns for patients, adds Montalvo. Clinicians and support staff must have access to the correct information at the right time to guide clinical care for LGBT patients. Only with the correct information can health centers appropriately screen and treat patients at risk for HIV, STI, depression, cancer screening, or alcohol and substance abuse.

Meetings are being planned with Pod D in Meriden to obtain their feedback and brainstorm around similar concepts.

The Weitzman research team would like to thank Pod A in Middletown and Pod D in Meriden for volunteering to help pilot the All of Us® research program with their panel of patients. The research team has met several times with Pod A to discuss the program and share protocol information and to obtain feedback on the type of information patients might find valuable and suggestions on how to best educate and engage patients to join the All of Us® project.

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The Weitzman Institute team collected hats, gloves, and warm socks for the Wherever You Are program to distribute to people in need.

About the All of Us Research Program

The All of Us® Research Program is an historic effort to gather data from one million or more people living in the United States to accelerate research and improve health. Wanda Montalvo, PhD, RN, associate director of Weitzman Institute, is the principal investigator and Amy Taylor, CHC vice president of the Western Region, is the deputy principal investigator. Migdaliz Soto is program coordinator and will work closely with Montalvo to facilitate day-to-day operations. Before joining Weitzman, Migdaliz worked as a senior patient services associate at CHC and brings a wealth of experience and knowledge of frontline operations that will benefit the rollout of this study. All of Us® will serve as a national research resource to inform thousands of studies, covering a wide variety of health conditions that affect many different people. As a 10-year observational longitudinal study, participants will have multiple opportunities to provide data about themselves to help researchers learn more about how individual differences in lifestyle, environment, and biological make-up can influence health and disease.

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In 13 states. “We are excited to have the opportunity to share our expertise and support with California providers,” says Agi Erickson, director of Project ECHO. The Weitzman ECHO Buprenorphine-California clinic is one of many opportunities offered as part of CCI’s Treating Addiction in the Primary Care Safety Net Program, which offers assistance to 24 HHSA Substance Abuse Service Expansion grant recipients in California. As in many states across the U.S., the rates of opioid abuse or dependence in California far outweigh the available resources for medication assisted treatment. In 2012, the rate of people with opioid addiction or dependence in California was more than double its buprenorphine treatment capacity. Weitzman ECHO plays a vital role helping these 14 health centers decrease this treatment disparity and expand the access to treatment by incorporating medication assisted treatment programs into their primary care clinics, adds Erickson.

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For more information, visit http://www.fenway.org/project-echo-lgbt/