

Health Policy Newsletter

Volume 17 Number 2

June, 2004

Article 5

JCHP to Conduct eHealth Summer Institute

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Suggested Citation:

Lyons KJ, Swenson-Miller K, Cornman-Levy D. JCHP to conduct eHealth Summer Institute. *Health Policy Newsletter* 2004; 17(2): Article 5. Retrieved [date] from <http://jdc.jefferson.edu/hpn/vol17/iss2/5>.

JCHP to Conduct eHealth Summer Institute

More effective and efficient delivery of health care services to individuals who are underserved has long been a recognized national need. A primary goal noted in the report *Healthy People 2010* was to “eliminate health disparities based on gender, race or ethnicity, education or income, disability, geographic location, or sexual orientation.”¹ One approach to addressing this issue is through more effective use of Internet technology. While the field of medicine, along with much of the private sector, has already embraced this technology, many disciplines comprising the allied health professions have not taken full advantage of the Internet as an adjunct to their practice.

The Center for Collaborative Research at Thomas Jefferson University received a three-year grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration Bureau of Health Professions to plan and conduct an eHealth Training Institute to address this disparity. The Institute is designed to provide occupational and physical therapists and speech-language pathologists with the knowledge and skills to develop web-based health programs for individuals in communities that are underserved. The project is being carried out in cooperation with the College’s departments of Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy, the American Speech-Language Hearing Association and Journey Home, a non-profit agency in Philadelphia.

Three Institutes are planned over the next three summers. Each will be a week-long, hands-on experience to help prepare interdisciplinary teams of allied health professionals working in an underserved community to work collaboratively to:

- tailor health information to that community;
- develop an eHealth program to address community needs;
- evaluate the impact of the program on the health of the community;
- incorporate principles of eHealth in practice, education and scholarship; and
- learn how to establish an eHealth infrastructure in the community.

The latter component is of particular importance since it will address ways in which teams can provide individuals in the community with access to the technology necessary for an eHealth program to be successful. This project grew out of a previous Bureau of Health Professions grant to develop and implement a health promotion website for individuals in transitional housing sites in the City of Philadelphia, which was described in this newsletter in December 2002.² The Institute was designed based on the experience of the project team in conducting this project.

Participants in the Institute will be three-person interdisciplinary teams of occupational therapists, physical therapists, and/or speech-language pathologists. Teams may be composed of faculty or clinicians in these disciplines who are working in underserved communities, either in urban or rural areas or with Native Americans.

Advertising and recruitment began in the fall of 2003. Over 70 requests for applications were received from individuals in the U.S., Canada and Great Britain. From this group, nineteen submitted applications for the six openings in the first Institute.

Each team is expected to bring to the Institute a specific plan for a health intervention in an underserved community. By the completion of the training, each team should have a significant portion of this intervention on a website and a plan for its implementation in the community. They will also 1) understand the necessary components of an eHealth infrastructure, 2) be aware of the resources necessary to implement an eHealth program, 3) be familiar with the barriers to implementation of eHealth programs, and 4) have tools which will allow them to evaluate the quality and appropriateness of health-related Internet websites. It is anticipated that, by the conclusion of the project, 20 teams will have health-related active websites in underserved communities.

The Institute will be held on the campus of Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, PA, from Tuesday, June 22, 2004 to Sunday, June 27, 2004.

References

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