

# IMPROVING ECONSULT RESPONSE QUALITY

## **Improving eConsult Response Quality Through Best Practice Education and Peer Feedback**

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NR.210.889.8101.SP23 | Project Evaluation and Dissemination

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April 9, 2023

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## Abstract

**Background and Purpose:** Community health centers (CHCs) have seen a rapid increase in the use of telehealth, including electronic provider-to-provider consultations (eConsults). Although eConsults have been shown to improve patient outcomes and reduce costs, there are still barriers to their successful adoption, including a lack of standardization in communication between specialists and primary care providers (PCPs) and a perceived reduction in relational engagement. This quality improvement project aims to analyze how evidence-based training on eConsult best practices and the provision of feedback impact the quality of eConsult responses to address these barriers and improve eConsult utilization in CHCs.

**Methods:** This project utilized a pre- and post-study design comparing specialist eConsult response quality scores at baseline and following two interventions. The first intervention was the provision of a one-hour educational session on eConsult best practices. The second intervention was the distribution of both the specialist's and cohort scores to the specialist. eConsults were rated by PCPs using a validated 10-question tool at baseline and following each intervention.

**Results:** Thirty-two physician specialists were recruited to participate in this project. Following the provision of best practices education, average eConsult response quality scores increased by approximately 11% and had a statistically significant improvement across all ten components analyzed ( $p = 0.005$ ). The provision of personal and cohort scores for feedback and comparison saw a slight additional increase in average quality scores which, while not statistically significant, did hold clinical significance.

**Conclusion:** Effective adoption of eConsult technology in CHCs is hindered by a lack of communication standardization and relational engagement. Best practices education and peer review can improve specialist response quality, facilitating successful collaboration between specialists and primary care providers. Further research is needed to determine long-term effects of such training.

**Keywords:** telehealth, electronic consults, eConsults, communication, community health