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Jefferson College of Health Professions Conducts Second e-Health Promotion Summer Institute

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Jefferson College of Health Professions Conducts Second e-Health Promotion Summer Institute

More effective and efficient delivery of healthcare services to individuals who are underserved has long been a recognized national need. One approach to addressing this issue is through more effective use of Internet technology. While the field of medicine, has already embraced this technology, many disciplines comprising the allied health professions have not taken full advantage of the Internet to provide services to those who are underserved. e-Health encompasses many online healthcare-related functions. One function is to provide health promotion services. e-Health promotion is a web-based application in which consumers are helped to understand their health conditions and become actively involved in managing their health. However, it appears that the larger allied health community is not aware of the potential of this approach. There also does not appear to be much funding for allied health initiatives in this area. If e-Health approaches can be demonstrated to be successful in reaching underserved population, it suggests health policy implications for both the professional communities and funding agencies.

As reported in the June 2004 *Health Policy Newsletter*, the Center for Collaborative Research at Thomas Jefferson University received a three-year grant from the Bureau of Health Professions to implement a Center for Excellence in e-Health Promotion Programs. The major goal of the project is to plan and conduct an e-Health Training Institute in which teams of allied health faculty and clinicians learn to develop and implement a website designed to address a problem in an underserved population. The project is a collaborative effort among the Departments of Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy in the College, the American Speech-Language Hearing Association and Journey Home, a non-profit agency in Philadelphia dedicated to working with the homeless community and other underserved populations.

Interdisciplinary teams of allied health professionals from across the country can apply to attend the Institute. Each team that is accepted is required to bring a plan for a health intervention in an underserved community. By the completion of the training, each team is expected to have learned how to design a web site that incorporates this plan. They also learn how to address issues of health and computer literacy as well as attend to the cultural characteristics of the population.

Six teams composed of faculty and clinicians attended the first Institute in the summer of 2004. These teams addressed a wide range of problems and populations. One project conducted by a team from Creighton University has developed a website focused on a campus-community partnership to promote a comprehensive health and wellness program in an American Indian reservation. Another, Holy Redeemer Home Care, in Philadelphia, developed a website to address the needs of the frail elderly in the City. A third group from Washington, DC, is developing a website using photo novellas for low literacy Hispanic and African Americans in a speech pathology clinic.

The second Institute was held on the campus of Thomas Jefferson University from June 20 to June 25. The proposed team projects included topics such as developing an informational and self-management strategy website for women with connective

disease disorders, a health promotion program for the underserved minority elderly in the City of Chicago, and an interactive health lifestyles' website for employees of the Louisiana Department of Labor. The motivation of another project was explained by one of the team members. "There is a shortage of healthcare providers in rural South Carolina, and we are developing an information-sharing network for them," said Ms. Kelly Musick, a team member working on filling gaps in services to therapists and families of children with disabilities, from the Center for Disability Resources at the University of South Carolina. "The Institute faculty is phenomenal...the resource structure is strong, and the connections with people from across the United States are great."

Although not all teams have been successful in completing their proposed website, progress is being made. Data from the first Institute suggests that developing websites is a much more labor intensive and time-consuming endeavor than most participants expected. However, approximately 50 percent of the teams have been successful in implementing their proposed programs, either as a whole or in part. While it is too early to determine the overall impact of the websites on the underserved communities for which they are designed, the success of some of the participants suggest that this can be a valuable approach in providing health services to members of these communities.

About the Authors

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