

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH POLICY FORUM

Building a Comprehensive Health Database for Use in City-Wide Health Management Systems

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Jeffrey Brenner, MD, a Camden, NJ family physician, discussed his experience building a comprehensive health database for the City of Camden and assembling a coalition of healthcare stakeholders, with an eye toward improving the quality, capacity, and accessibility of the healthcare system for the city's vulnerable populations.

The database was created from a local dataset using billing data from all of the Camden hospitals. Analysis showed that in 2003, 50% of Camden's population used an emergency department (ED) or hospital, double the national rate; and that many of the ED and hospital visits were for minor or preventable problems that could have been avoided through improved access to primary care. The report is available at www.camconnect.org. Research is ongoing.

Among its goals, the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers (www.camdenhealth.org) provides practice management assistance to individual primary care practices to improve their capacity, and works to address the complex needs of "super-utilizers" targeted by Brenner's research – patients who repeatedly visit the hospitals or EDs in Camden.