

Spreading Innovations 2016 Team Highlights: Western Sierra Medical Clinic

Western Sierra Medical Clinic (WSMC) is an operational 330-funded Community Health Clinic and has been the main safety net provider for low-income, senior and uninsured populations in the remote region of Western Sierra County since 1974. WSMC



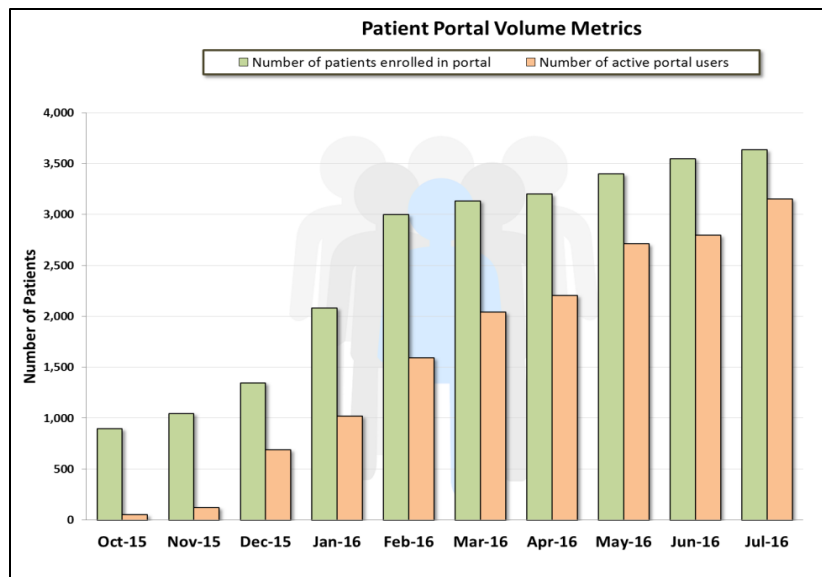
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attempted the launch of a patient portal in 2012. However, the software was not integrated with WSMC’s EMR system and as a result, proved, even in the very early stages of implementation, to be too cumbersome for both staff and patients to use successfully. In March 2015, WSMC implemented a new EMR, which included an integrated patient portal module. The system was selected because a number of specialists and providers in the area were using the same software and more are considering using it, enabling WSMC to be part of a growing regional health information exchange. Like other health care organizations, WSMC launched its patient portal to benefit its patients and providers. Implementing a patient portal can result in longer-term payoffs, such as greater administrative efficiencies and improved responsiveness to patients’ needs.

WSMC launched its *My Health Gateway* patient portal starting with three providers from their Family Medicine Department. The portal team at WSMC launched a controlled rollout, using a phased approach to implement the patient portal starting at its Grass Valley and Downieville locations and with a small number of patients. By implementing a “slow roll out” in combination with effective marketing tools, staff and providers in both clinics were able to learn the system thoroughly to feel comfortable with all aspects and features of the portal before a phased roll out to more patients and more locations was attempted.

Over the course of the project period, the team successfully enrolled over 3,600 members into its *My Health Gateway* patient portal, including over 3,100



members who are active portal users. Patients from all providers are now using the portal. The team has also developed a rigorous training protocol on using the portal to ensure buy-in from staff and clinicians. Every clinician and staff member has been through multiple trainings in group settings and each has received one-on-one training for their respective scope. Use of the portal is also reviewed in onboarding for new staff and clinicians. The team has also documented a decrease in call volume from about 11,500 calls in September 2015 to about 7,900 calls in July 2016.

Looking forward, the portal implementation team's focus will be on sustaining its portal operations and launching additional functionalities through the portal, such as its *Ask a Question* feature.