



Institute for Community Health

A collaboration of the Cambridge Health Alliance, Mount Auburn Hospital, and Partners Healthcare

2008 AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Getting in sync: Improving communication across primary care and mental health disciplines through web-based technology.

Aaron Kirby, MSc; Steve Carter; Karen Hacker, MD, MPH

As many health care organizations adopt electronic medical records (EMR), communication across borders of primary care providers (PCPs) and mental health agencies external to their practice has become more challenging particularly regarding compliance with HIPAA regulations. Data sent to external agencies must be encrypted in order to protect the security of patient information. In addition, PCPs have less time to collaborate with external providers and prefer to make their referrals internally via the EMR. In Cambridge, MA, a sustainable web-based referral tool that allows client information to be shared in a secure environment between PCPs and external mental health agencies was developed. In order to create this simplistic referral system, seven community partners provided consultation to develop a user friendly IT system that fulfills numerous diverse legal requirements. The "E-Ref" system transmits secured information to the referral agency by syncing with the hospital registration system. Patient consent is required. The challenges of developing this system include financial, legal, and complex issues of electronic access at multiple agencies attempting to link providers. Such a system has the potential to transform the delivery of mental health services for children by making communication between PCP and mental health/substance abuse providers more efficient as well as linking screening with services. This presentation will discuss the development of the "E-ref" system and the various adaptations needed to insure its utilization and sustainability.