Cutchins Celebrates First Anniversary of Integrated EHR System

Cutchins Programs for Children & Families, founded in 1977 and based in Northampton, provides residential treatment, outpatient care, and special education services for children and families in Western Massachusetts who struggle with the impacts of trauma, mental illness, and behavioral health challenges.

Challenge
Improve Efficiency to Stay Focused on Mission

Cutchins needed a streamlined process to submit the assessment data required for all children in treatment, called Child Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS). Creating documentation to comply with requirements from the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) and insurance companies drained resources that could otherwise be dedicated to patient care.

For example psychiatrists, who are a critical part of the interdisciplinary team that treats Cutchins' patients, have limited time during appointments to help an adolescent develop fundamental skills. Preparing and submitting duplicate patient records or interacting with disparate systems that are unable to share information cuts into their time with patients.

Cutchins decided to replace its inefficient legacy systems with an Electronic Health Record (EHR) system that would enable electronic Health Information Exchange (HIE). The agency understood that the effort would require consistent commitment and anticipation of the obstacles typically encountered with the implementation of a new care management system. In particular, the clinicians, office staff, and partners would require training in the efficient use of the new technology.

Solution
Implement an EHR System and Build an Onramp to the Mass HIway

Cutchins used the Mass HIway Implementation Grant they were awarded by MeHI, the Massachusetts eHealth Institute, to implement an EHR system and connect to the Commonwealth's Health Information Exchange (HIE), the Mass HIway.

Access to the Mass HIway enables electronic communication among the care team involved in the treatment of the children and families the agency serves. This team includes outpatient and residential clinicians and staff, contractors, and staff at public health agencies.

The EHR system, which went live on May 1, 2014, electronically transmits the agency's CANS data via the Mass HIway. Any authorized entity can now access all required patient information once it establishes the necessary online connections.

Cutchins did its homework before implementing their EHR system. The agency interviewed other behavioral health providers about their systems, collaborated with provider partners, and defined its own specific needs before negotiating a contract with Credible, the EHR vendor.

eCutchins Programs
for Children & Families

The system was carefully designed to feature the specific functionality Cutchins' professionals needed to accomplish the healing work they do with children and families.

Like Cutchins, many small behavioral health agencies lack the personnel or resources needed to tackle a large technology implementation. They can benefit from lessons learned by early adopters. MeHI's website provides resources for small practices, including EHR and HIE success stories and a wealth of EHR tools and tips.

In early 2015, MeHI awarded Cutchins a grant from the eQuality Incentive Program (eQIP). This grant program specifically supports and funds behavioral health providers across Massachusetts in their use of Health IT to enhance the quality and efficiency of healthcare while containing costs.

The agency will use the grant to add functionality to their EHR system and expand their use of the Mass HIway, enabling them to communicate electronically with pharmacies, labs, primary care physicians, and other medical providers who treat the same population of traumatized children.

The goal is to ensure consistent exchange of comprehensive, real-time information that accurately reflects a patient's treatment plan and status at any given time. Through this grant program, Cutchins will be guided through a milestone-based model to advance the maturity of its EHR system and accelerate the integration into the statewide Health IT infrastructure.

Impact
Health IT Drives Compassionate Coordinated Care

The Cutchins EHR system allowed the agency to replace cumbersome, antiquated reporting and billing processes, and to improve communication between clinicians and office staff. Fewer manual tasks translated into a significantly less time spent on processing paperwork and more time dedicated to patient care, achieving cost efficiencies immediately after the EHR implementation.

"The Mass HIway represents a significant leap forward in Health IT," says Cutchins Executive Director Jay Indik.

As the technology evolves and system advancements accelerate integrated care, Indik expects increased interoperability among behavioral health agencies and healthcare providers. Today, most of Cutchins' outpatient provider partners boast more robust electronic systems than those installed in residential treatment centers. As that gap closes, information sharing between providers will become more efficient and timely.

"It's a one-step-at-a-time process," says Indik. "And every milestone achieved presents another opportunity to leverage Health IT and improve the quality of care."

Health IT empowers members of the treatment team to cohesively address the behavioral, medical, and educational needs of the population they serve. Indik emphasizes the need for providers to learn how to more effectively negotiate and collaborate with one another.

An interdisciplinary approach built on service-focused decision making is required to maximize the benefits of an integrated Health IT system. As long as providers remain focused on the needs of families, and orient care and services around that core mission, the technology will supply the momentum for success.

For more information about Cutchins Programs for Children & Families, visit cutchins.org.

"The mandated implementation of an EHR system could have put us under. The MeHI grant provided our small agency with the resources we needed to launch our EHR system and ramp up to speed one step at a time without diverting focus from our mission to protect childhood, and help Massachusetts children and families lead happy, productive, and satisfying lives."

—Jay Indik, Executive Director, Cutchins