

Project ECHO® (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes)

HRSA: FQHCs May Use 330 Grants to Participate in Project ECHO

Federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) may use grants awarded by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) under Section 330 of the Public Health Services Act to support staff participation in ongoing educational and telementoring programs such as Project ECHO, according to Tonya Bowers, acting associate administrator of HRSA's Bureau of Primary Health Care.

Bowers made the statement in response to a question asked during the annual conference of the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) last August.

Primary care clinicians at resource-strained FQHCs often care for patients who suffer from complex chronic conditions such as hepatitis C, HIV, chronic pain, depression, and diabetes. Regular mentorship and support through programs such as Project ECHO have been shown to increase primary care clinicians' capacity for treating patients with such conditions. Through Project ECHO, front-line health care professionals—including doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and community health workers—can participate in weekly teleECHO sessions with multidisciplinary specialty teams at academic medical centers.

Sanjeev Arora, M.D., founder and director of Project ECHO, notes that models such as ECHO help patients get the care they need in or near the communities where they live. "Too often, patients must wait for months or travel long distances in order to get specialty care. By participating in Project ECHO, primary care clinicians at FQHCs can treat patients close to home, in a culturally appropriate setting, with a care team that patients know and trust. In fact, we have shown that care provided by primary care clinicians mentored by an ECHO specialist team is at least as effective as care provided at a university specialty clinic."

About Project ECHO

Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) is a movement to demopolize knowledge and increase capacity to provide best-practice care for underserved people all over the world. This low-cost, high-impact intervention is accomplished through weekly teleECHO™ clinics that link front-line providers at multiple sites with multidisciplinary specialist teams for mentorship and case-based learning. In this way, primary care clinicians acquire new expertise to treat patients with complex conditions in their own communities. Unlike traditional telemedicine, which creates a one-to-one connection between a patient and a specialist, under the ECHO model™, primary care clinicians retain responsibility for managing their patients—and in fact gain new expertise that allows them to treat more patients with complex chronic conditions.

For more information, visit <http://echo.unm.edu/join-an-echo/> or contact Andrea Bradford, abradford@salud.unm.edu.