Increasing access to specialty care through eConsults
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Introduction

- eConsults allow primary care providers (PCP) to consult with specialists electronically for concise clinical questions that do not require an office visit. This poster describes the first-year experience of a large, public university’s Student Health and Wellness (SHW) Center, in implementing eConsults in collaboration with specialists located in the adjacent university academic medical center. It also outlines logistical challenges with implementation due to the use of two different electronic medical record (EMR) systems.

Program Design

- eConsults had already been successfully implemented within the Medical Center.
- SHW was the first ambulatory clinic, not on the same EMR as the Medical Center, to implement eConsults as a pilot program in collaboration with specialists located in the adjacent university academic medical center.
- The program has since been expanded to: Concussion, Pulmonology, Allergy, Hematology, and Rheumatology.
- SHW providers already had access to a view-only Epic Care Link (ECL) but required new Epic permissions to enter orders into ECL.

Process for Placing the Order

1. Place the order
   - Provider places order in Medicat (SHW EMR), as well as in Epic Care Link (medical center EMR) with clear clinical question and pertinent patient medical history.

2. eConsult completed
   - Specialist receives the eConsult in their inbasket. They write a detailed response to the clinical question and lock the note in Epic.

3. eConsult received
   - SHW Front desk staff monitor the eConsult order daily for a completed note, in a similar way they would monitor a regular referral. When it has been completed, they upload the completed eConsult into Medicat for ordering provider to view.

Results

- 27 eConsults have been completed since the introduction of the program.
- All eConsults were completed within 5 business days.
- 92% were completed without needing a full referral.

Discussion

- The vast majority of eConsults thus far have been for Neurology, given that was the first specialty available, though recently it has been more evenly spread between the specialties.
- Barriers in implementation:
  - “Credentialing” of SHW providers in ECL
  - Patient Registration in Epic (including insurance information)
- Lessons learned:
  - Close oversight of work-flow after implementation was needed to allow for troubleshooting.
  - The quick turn-around of eConsults (<5 business days) allowed for the PCP to provide effective treatment to the patient much more quickly than waiting for a referral to be completed.

Conclusion and Future Directions

- The use of eConsults for less complex patient referral questions allows the preservation of specialty clinics for more complex cases.
- A benefit that is difficult to quantify is the learning that occurs from the PCP consulting with the specialist in this way. This will likely decrease need for future referrals for similar reasons.
- There is uncertainty regarding insurance coverage of eConsults in the future as the Public Health Emergency for COVID-19 ends.
- Planning to expand to also include Endocrinology and Gastroenterology specialties as eConsults.