

SHIP Active Referrals Initiative

Final evaluation report

Prepared for Blue Earth County Public Health as part of their SHIP grant evaluation

Blue Earth County Public Health is working with health care providers and community leaders on the SHIP Active Referrals Initiative, which focuses on building partnerships to better facilitate active referrals of patients to local resources that increase access to high quality nutritious foods, opportunities for physical activity, and tobacco use cessation. The project is part of a larger effort by Blue Earth County Public Health, which is funded by the Minnesota Department of Health's Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP).

This report provides a snapshot of the overall impact of this initiative, with emphasis on reporting for the most recent evaluation period (January 2011 through June 2011). This report was prepared by Wilder Research. Blue Earth SHIP compiled existing data and collected original data as a part of this evaluation, using tools developed by Wilder Research.

Reach

Blue Earth's service area includes 17 health care settings throughout the county. Blue Earth County Public Health is currently working with one clinic in the service area: the Mayo Clinic Health System – EastRidge. Other Mayo Health System Clinics within the local calling area did not participate in the Active Referrals Initiative, but were included in the Mankato Area Healthy Living Resource Guide.

Healthcare Facility	Number of patients served in 2010
Mayo Clinic Health System—EastRidge	36,949
Mayo Clinic Health System—NorthRidge	30,499
Mayo Clinic Health System—St. Peter	7,928
Mayo Clinic Health System—Parkview	4,163

This intervention has directly engaged one provider, Dr. Stephen Campbell. Dr. Campbell, a Chief Knowledge Management Medical Officer and family medicine provider within the Mayo Clinic Health System, referred all of the patients that participated in the Grube Activity Program component of the initiative. The Mayo Clinic Health System will be providing the Mankato Area Healthy Living Resource Guide, which includes information about healthy living resources, to over 100 health care providers in the future. This will benefit the patients they serve.

Activities

Blue Earth SHIP conducted numerous activities related to this initiative. Specifically, Amy Conner, a Wellness Educator from the Mayo Clinic Health System, provided valuable insight and assistance on this project. She has worked closely with providers to identify barriers and solutions to referring patients to local resources.

The Mayo Clinic Health System surveyed 53 health care providers in the Mayo Clinic Health System from the Mankato area to understand barriers to referring patients to tobacco cessation, physical activity, and nutrition resources. Providers were surveyed from January through February 2011. Results found that:

- Eight out of 10 providers address tobacco cessation with current tobacco users always or most of the time.
- Half of providers talk to patients about nutrition during office visits always or most of the time.
- Over half of providers talk to their patients during office visits about exercise always or most of the time. The biggest barriers to discussing exercise with patients are lack of time during the appointment, frustration with patients not exercising or making excuses, and lack of reimbursement. However, three-quarters of respondents support assessing physical activity as a vital sign.
- Less than half of the providers follow-up after an office visit always or most of the time on their recommendations to patients regarding tobacco cessation, physical activity, and/or nutrition.
- To assist them in referring at-risk patients to available resources, providers noted that it would be helpful to have other staff to follow-up with patients, more access to wellness professionals within their organization, a list or database of community-based healthy living resources, a standard protocol for making referrals, and health plan reimbursement.

This information provides Blue Earth SHIP staff and Mayo Clinic Health System providers with information and recommendations to move forward with the Active Referrals Initiative.

Other activities conducted as part of this initiative include:

- **Participating in a wellness coach training program.** Two health professionals from the Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato participated in a 13-week wellness coach training program designed to provide them with additional knowledge and skills to speak with patients about their health and wellness goals. Information from

the training was used to develop a referral program for patients at risk of or currently experiencing chronic disease due to obesity called “Prescription for Wellness: the Gruve Activity Program” (see description below).

- **Developing the Gruve Activity Program.** The Gruve Activity Program developed by the Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato was a 13-week pilot program designed to provide patients with tools and resources to improve their health and manage their weight by increasing daily movement. Participants met with a Mayo Clinic Health System health educator and were provided with a 3D motion sensor that measured their caloric expenditure. Patients were also required to attend group educational sessions, participate in a baseline health assessment, and meet with their health educator at week 13. Topics covered in the educational sessions included behavior change, nutrition, strength training, and practical exercise.

Overall, 54 patients were referred to the Gruve Activity Program and 49 participated. Week 13 appointments with participants began the week of May 30th. As a result of the program, 48 percent of patients lost at least two pounds, and the total cumulative weight lost for participants was 176.5 pounds. Thirty-two participants lost inches from their waist circumference, and the total cumulative inches lost for participants was 65 inches. Participants also lost a total of 23 percent body fat. In order to determine a participant’s fitness score, each patient’s self-reported level of physical activity was added to other biometric data. Eighty-seven percent of participants increased their physical activity levels, which also increased their fitness score. Compared to baseline scores, participants were more likely to say that their health is “excellent” or “very good,” and were less likely to report feeling sad, depressed, worried or anxious. Respondents were also more likely to get adequate sleep and feel healthy and full of energy.

Forty-seven of the 49 participants completed a satisfaction survey (for a response rate of 96%). Ninety-six percent of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they were pleased with the overall structure of the program, and 98 percent would recommend the Gruve Activity Program to a friend. Ninety-six percent of respondents felt that their physician’s referral to the program showed them that their health care provider cares about their health, and 89 percent of Gruve program participants noted that being referred to the program by their physician greatly impacted their decision to join. Participants felt that the Gruve program and 3D motion sensor motivated them to increase their physical activity levels and held them accountable for maintaining regular exercise.

After the follow-up visits, the health educator submitted a note in the patient’s electronic medical record that was shared with the participant’s provider. Some comments include:

The Gruve was just the right tool for my patient. Physical activity has increased dramatically. When my patient first started walking, the distance was limited to less than a half mile. They are now walking two miles most days of the week. The patient reported that their energy level is way up, and mentally feels much better. Other benefits have been a decrease in total cholesterol and an increase in HDL.

My patient has gone from a sedentary lifestyle, where walking was limited to their daily routine, to one that incorporates activity daily. They reported getting better rest, feeling good, and having a lot more energy.

My patient said that the Gruve was a great way for them to become aware of their activity or lack of, and calorie expenditure. They have a much better understanding of the number of calories burned during exercise and daily living, and feel that they know what it's going to take to continue their weight loss journey. This patient was very optimistic about their future wellness plans and was thankful for the Gruve program.

In order to further support patients with making healthy lifestyle changes, a Healthy Living Resource Center at the Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato is in the final stages of development. Gruve Activity Program participants, other Mayo patients, and Mayo Clinic Health System employees will be able to check out workout equipment, workout DVDs, and heart rate monitors. During the week 13 follow-up visits, many Gruve participants indicated that it would be helpful to use different exercise equipment and try various modes of activity to determine what they might like to purchase for their home to make exercise more convenient. Participants are also interested in weekly group fitness classes, and the Mayo Clinic Health System is planning to include supervised exercise sessions in their next program.

- **Making changes to the Mankato Area Healthy Living Resource Guide.** Final modifications were made to the Guide in June 2011. Health care providers will be able to distribute this pamphlet to patients to address the importance of physical activity, healthy eating, and tobacco cessation and to provide information about local resources. Approximately 5,000 copies have been made and will be distributed to local health care providers.
- **Making copies of an active living brochure available.** Approximately 6,000 copies of the Be Active Your Way brochure, developed by Health Improvement Partners (HIP), were created and will be distributed within the Mayo Clinic Health System in clinic waiting areas and exam rooms. The brochure outlines the importance of physical activity and provides examples of moderate and vigorous activities. Amy Conner also has copies of the brochure available at worksites during health promotion events, such as cholesterol screenings and blood pressure checks.

- **Creating a community healthy living website.** Information from the Mankato Area Healthy Living Resource Guide is also being integrated into a community healthy living website (www.healthylivingmankato.org). The Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato has contracted VoyageurWeb to develop the site, and the site will be made available in late June 2011. Health Improvement Partners will be advertising the website through commercials on a local television station. The website was also included in the Be Active Your Way brochure.
- **Hosting a physical activity seminar for health care providers.** The Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato held the first Exercise is Medicine Seminar for health care providers in June 2011. Three presenters covered topics such as the importance of physical activity, different components of physical activity (cardiovascular, strength, and stretching), current physical activity recommendations, and how to talk to patients about exercise. The seminar included an interactive segment that used both cardiovascular and strength training equipment. Dr. Campbell attended the session, and plans to lead a discussion on adding physical activity questions to the electronic medical record (EMR) at an upcoming provider meeting in July 2011.

The Gruve Activity Program, the Mankato Area Healthy Living Resource Guide, and the community healthy living website align with results from the survey, as providers felt that having staff available to follow-up with patients, giving patients access to wellness professionals, and having a list or database of community-based healthy living resources would be helpful. As the initiative moves forward, “Prescription for Wellness” will refer to a variety of resources and programs to promote healthy living. A second activity device, the Fitbit Tracker, will be used for another activity-based wellness program. The Fitbit tracks calories burned, steps taken, distance traveled and sleep quality. It also allows a person to track calorie consumption by logging food and beverage intake, which the Gruve website did not incorporate.

Policy, systems, and environments

One of the goals of SHIP is to change policies, systems, and environments to make the healthy choice the easy choice, and to ensure sustainability beyond the end of any one particular program or funding stream. In the case of the Active Referrals Initiative, it means specifically changing policies, systems, and environments in health care settings to promote referrals of patients to local resources that increase access to high quality nutritious foods, opportunities for physical activity, and tobacco use cessation.

So far, one Health Care Work Group (HCWG) has been created to develop these partnerships. This will hopefully lead to further policy, systems, and environmental changes to promote increased access to and use of community resources. At the clinic, **a practice has currently changed without a formal policy being adopted.** The activities

are currently **somewhat sustainable** – some of the work may be sustained, but **additional efforts are needed to ensure implementation.**

Longer-term impact

Along with the expertise of health care providers, there are a variety of evidence-based community programs that help individuals to initiate and maintain healthy behaviors such as increased physical activity, healthy eating habits, and tobacco cessation. A broad approach that coordinates the efforts of the medical community and local community resources through active referral systems supports individuals beyond routine health care visits, which ultimately improves outcomes.

As all of these efforts continue, short-term outcomes will include increased awareness among primary care providers about the importance of active referrals and increased referrals by providers to relevant local resources such as the Grube Activity Program or the community healthy living website. Intermediate outcomes will be a well-established active referral system and an increased percentage of Blue Earth County residents who consume a healthy diet, engage in physical activity, and reduce or quit using tobacco.

This will ultimately lead to a decreased percentage of Blue Earth County residents who experience chronic disease.



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