

North Shore
Community Health Center

*Addressing the Dental Needs of
the Suboxone population*

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Massachusetts League
of Community Health Centers

Introductions:

- Gabrielle DeMille is the Director of Dental Services at North Shore Community Health Inc., in addition, she sees patients at Salem Family Health Center.
- Cynthia Robinson is a Clinical LPN at the Salem Family Health Center in the medical department.
- Ofelia Garcia is the Dental Referral Coordinator and lead Dental Assistant.

Who is North Shore Community Health?

- North Shore Community Health is a federally qualified comprehensive community health agency serving the North Shore, Cape Ann, and surrounding communities.
- We are a patient centered medical home, offering primary, dental, behavioral, and addiction care at three sites: Salem, Peabody, and Gloucester.
- In addition, we have two high school based primary care clinics in Salem and Peabody.
- SFHC is the largest site and has approximately 8,500 active medical patients and we see approximately 1,000 patients per month.

Integration Workflow Concerns:

- The medical and dental departments were substantially separate, both physically and culturally.
- We had no way to send in-house dental referrals through our EHR.
- We did not have any infrastructure in place to prompt medical providers to ask patients about dental care.
- Our EHRs did not communicate with each other.
- We did not have any way to electronically close the referral loop.

Project Overview:

- Our original charter focused on expanding services to our diabetic and obstetrical patients.
- Most of these patients claimed existing outside dental homes or were not interested in accessing in-house dental care.
- Sustaining consistent medical provider participation was challenging.
- Due to low numbers of participants, the team decided to expand our referral base to include patients in our MAT program.

Challenges:

- Substance use patients often have a deep distrust of the healthcare system.
- Pain and fear of pain are significant barriers.
- Continued desire to access dental care may depend on continued success with MAT.
- Regulations limit the number of Suboxone patients that providers can see.

Consideration when targeting a MAT population:

- The ability to access quality dental care is an additional incentive for continued compliance with abstinence.
- Patients have regularly scheduled appointments with an RN case manager and build trusted relationships.
- Many of MAT patients have a significant need for long neglected dental care.
- Demographics of this population may be more favorable for success.

Successes:

- Medical personnel routinely ask all patients about dental care and referral through the EHR is easy.
- The MAT population has been receptive to dental referrals. We are averaging 5-7 referrals per week.
- Our MAT philosophy is to offer those patients the maximum amount of needed health care at the earliest opportunity and with the least barriers.
- We have recently added an in-house prescribing psychiatrist who specializes in addiction and pain management.

Future Plans

- Increasing collaboration with the MAT team, both at SFHC and across the organization to refine referral criteria for best use of our limited resources.
- We continue to refer diabetic patients.
- Increasing medical staff education on the importance of medical/dental integration.

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Questions?

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