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Saint Louis University's AHEC partners with the Saint Louis University Practice Based Research Network ARCHNet work with local primary care doctors to improve nutrition counseling and intervention

According to the American Diabetes Association, about 11.4% of adults have diabetes with more than 42 thousand being newly diagnosed every year. Total medical expenses for diabetes patients in Missouri are estimated to be about \$4.9 billion (direct costs) and \$1.8 billion (indirect costs – i.e., lost productivity). MAHEC has found that it is important to involve young doctors, nutritionists and behavioral health providers in working with community-based clinics to find solutions and better ways to intervene. MAHEC does this through strong partnerships with physicians and academic institutions.



One strategy for better intervention is through better screening processes. This is a strategy that is part of what has been referred to as “practice transformation.” Practice transformation refers to value added activities which serve to prevent chronic disease and improve health overall.

Practice transformation activities also include partnering with research to engage in quality improvement activities, which help doctors better understand the efficacy of their practice. These types of activities – that is - adding researchers to an interprofessional team – allows doctors to utilize precision

medicine and to implement treatments which are more likely to be effective for patients. MAHEC worked with ARCHNet, nutritionists and their network of local doctors in the St. Louis Metropolitan region, along with health profession students to develop and identify measures which can help providers determine when patients are eating foods that increase their likelihood of being diagnosed with diabetes, but also measures which help explain why patients are eating these kinds of foods, including attitudes about nutrition and access to healthy foods. Social determinants of health indicators also play a major role and were included in the screen. Physicians can then use this screen to prompt discussions about patient diet and engage their interprofessional team to find solutions that actually work for patients.

So far, eleven primary care practices (including larger health networks and federally qualified health centers) have participated. SLU AHEC has also engaged 10 medical students, 4 behavioral health professions students and one bachelors level student on this project. Students had opportunities to learn how to do quality improvement within practice, and learn about interprofessional teams, practice transformation and social determinants of health. They also learned from participating physicians how to use screening instruments to engage in difficult topics, and provided doctors with information sheets showing aggregate results of their patients, as well as recommendations for care coordination and referral. This screening instrument is also being used to develop interventions in primary care settings which can provide additional opportunities for health professions students. More is to come from MAHEC.

MAHEC is a partnership of seven locally governed organizations and three university-based health professions education programs working statewide to increase the numbers of Missouri youth entering stable, high-paying jobs as healthcare professionals and the numbers of professionals caring for underserved populations.

The MAHEC partners include:

- A.T. Still University Kirksville
- University of Missouri-Columbia
- Saint Louis University
- East Central Missouri ECMO AHEC – St. Louis
- Mid-Missouri AHEC – Rolla
- Northeast Missouri NEMO AHEC – Kirksville
- Northwest Missouri NWMO AHEC – St. Joseph
- Southeastern Missouri SEMO AHEC – Poplar Bluff
- Southwestern Missouri SWMO AHEC - Springfield
- West Central Missouri WCMO AHEC – Kansas City

