

## 6) e-Consults in Ambulatory Specialty Care – FINALIST

Partners HealthCare Population Health Management

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### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

To address the rising rate of specialty referral and continued challenges with specialty access, in 2014, we established the e-Consults program, through which primary care physicians can request direct “doc to doc” consults through a secure electronic referral order platform, for low risk patients for whom a formal consultation may not be necessary. To participate, primary care physicians (PCP) submit a short question to the targeted specialty. The question is routed to the appropriate specialist who reviews the clinical record and provides a written response in 48 hours. The specialist enters the response in the EMR and emails it directly to the PCP. The specialist receives a payment per completed e-Consult reviewed, approximately \$75. If the consult is inappropriate for e-Consultation, the specialist requests that the patient is scheduled for an appointment. The PCP is responsible for implementation of e-Consult recommendations.

### OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

- 27 active practices across two large ambulatory care sites.
- 2,442 e-Consults have been completed since Jan 1, 2014.
- 1,587 visits avoided. Estimation based on chart review of 100 sample cardiology e-Consults showing that 65% of patients did not have any type of traditional visit within 6 months and a survey of PCPs who would have submitted a referral if the e-consult option had not been available.
- An evaluation of the cardiology e-Consult program found:
- Growth in traditional cardiology consults during the intervention period less than matched specialties without e-consult program (4.5% vs. 10.1%,  $p < 0.001$ )
- E-consult patients were younger than traditional consult patients (55.3 vs. 60.4 years,  $p < 0.001$ )
- Surveys show overwhelming patient and provider support for e-Consults
- Growth: The most recent quarterly volume at the largest site was 88% higher than that of the previous quarter, and 7 times that for the same period in 2014.

### LESSONS LEARNED

- e-Consults can replace formal face-to-face consultation in many cases, leading to reduced costs, improved access, and improved provider satisfaction.
- Despite initial concerns regarding patient safety, negative financial impact, and added administrative burden, both PCPs and specialists are satisfied with the ability to respond to patients’ needs more rapidly through e-Consults.
- Initial utilization by PCPs was variable –targeted marketing to PCP practices and a small one-time incentive for participation has driven recent increases in activity.