

## ACHIEVING COST SAVINGS: ECONSULTS AT UW HEALTH

In 2014, University of Wisconsin (UW) Health was selected to participate in the Association of American Medical Colleges' initial pilot of Project CORE, funded by a Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation Award, along with four additional academic medical centers. Project CORE improves the referral process between primary care providers (PCPs) and specialists by implementing EMR-based tools known as eConsults and enhanced referrals with the goal of improving access, quality, and patient and provider experience.

For UW Health, an integrated health system with more than 600,000 patients, and 1,500 physicians spread over seven hospitals and 87 outpatient clinics in the region, eConsults allow for more efficient specialist input and more cost-effective care delivery when a patient's condition can be managed by their PCP. As compared to a traditional "curbside," eConsults are a higher-quality exchange with templated decision support and a workflow facilitating better coordination and communication between the PCP and specialist.

To ensure the sustainability and growth of the eConsults program, UW leadership led a cost analysis that determined eConsults decreased costs of care for their system due to fewer in-person visits. Specialists are able to see more high-acuity patients, improving timeliness to care for those patients with the greatest need. Not only is it improving access, but the CORE model is also decreasing potential fragmentation of care by maintaining patients' care with their PCP where appropriate. These benefits, along with high provider satisfaction and continuing education for primary care, have made the CORE model a great success at UW Health.

"The implementation of eConsults led to a host of benefits at UW Health. It is one of those rare programs that improves things for us at every level: improved clinical care, enhanced education between specialists and primary doctors, decreased costs of overall care for everyone while at the same time improving the work satisfaction of our clinical providers of care."

*Peter Newcomer, MD, Senior Vice President, Chief Clinical Officer*

### In the first three years of the program:



**~\$1.8M estimated savings for the Medicare** primary care population served by UW, due to visits saved to CORE specialties post-implementation.



**Access to timely specialty input** within 14 days of PCP referral or eConsult improved from 9.1% to 22.8% in participating specialties.



**>5,400 eConsults were completed**, accounting for **6.2% of all specialty consultation**.



**Widespread adoption and effectiveness** of the program: **86% of primary care faculty** sent an eConsult during the project period. **90% of patients** who had an eConsult were managed without a follow-up specialty visit.