



MHCI Mayor's Healthy Communities Initiative
A Health Network for Hartford's Uninsured

Margarita V. Torres
Program Director
175 Main Street
Hartford, CT 06106
Phone: 860-547-1391
MargaritaTorres@MHCI.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

May, 2006

MHCI—The Mayor's Healthy Communities Initiative—is a new Hartford health network designed to better serve the healthcare needs of the city's estimated 30,000+ uninsured residents. The Office of Mayor Eddie Perez is working with the City's major hospitals and clinics to implement the program's three major objectives:

- Create a common, shared Medical Information Database and Patient Membership Card System to better coordinate the healthcare services offered by the City's safety net providers to uninsured patients;
- Provide assigned Patient Navigators who will guide uninsured residents through the healthcare system, including assisting with the enrollment process required to obtain Medicaid insurance assistance, if eligible;
- Offer Medical Interpreters/Cultural Translators to help patients better communicate with their medical caregivers.

The MHCI project team will develop an ongoing assessment process to evaluate the information systems and service procedures. This evaluation will ensure the program's sustainability and guarantee that quality and timely medical services are provided for uninsured Hartford residents.

MHCI will launch this integrated healthcare system on May 1st, 2006. A Patient Navigator will issue a personalized MHCI Identification Card to patients and assign them a permanent "medical home" where they can go to receive treatment. Starting in May, "Cover the Uninsured Week", all Hartford residents that do not have health insurance and wish to visit a doctor will be able to enroll in the MHCI program at the Hispanic Health Council on Main Street in Hartford, or any of the Hartford Health Network Providers—Hartford Hospital, St. Francis Hospital, Charter Oak Health Centers, and Community Health Services.

MHCI is committed to reducing systemic disparities in existing healthcare by eliminating language and cultural obstacles that often result in inadequate patient treatment. By next September a Medical Interpretation Program will be offered at Capitol Community College. Each participating Hartford Healthcare Provider will be sending a member of their staff for specialized training in this important area. MHCI will be committed to providing improved quality of care for all Hartford's uninsured residents.

Office of Mayor Eddie Perez, City of Hartford

Aetna Foundation • Charter Oak Health Center • Community Health Services • CT Children's Medical Center • Evolution Benefits

Hartford Health Disparities Collaborative • Hartford Hospital • Hispanic Health Council • St. Francis Hospital • The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving

PATIENT NAVIGATION

Background

The philosophy of Care Coordination describes an informed process for delivering quality and equitable health care to all. It is guided by core concepts of family-centeredness, partnership and a commitment to continuous quality improvement; improvement that can be assessed within a framework of results-based accountability. In brief, a sense of “Medical Home” is created when anyone – one individual and/or members of a family can approach a primary care provider with confidence in a comprehensive health care assessment and management plan that addresses all of the medical (and non-medical) challenges that we face: mental, behavioral, developmental, dental, nutritional, educational, environmental, and socioeconomic.

Goal

The goal of MHCI is to develop a user-friendly method for enrolling Hartford’s uninsured residents in a program of Care Coordination. The innovative role of MHCI Patient Navigator will assist enrollees in navigating Hartford’s healthcare systems, as well as assign patients a Medical Home, and ensure quality medical care that is preventative, continuous and sustainable.

Tactical Plan (1st & 2nd Q’s 2006)

To realize these critical objectives, MHCI has designed a reliable enrollment process. The team has assessed the need to combine typical enrollment procedures with the introduction of a pioneering, new element of the MHCI system: the Patient Navigators. These critical MHCI staff members are essentially medical guidance counselors and advocates whose role is to guarantee that uninsured patients who need assistance in finding their way through this new integrated medical system will always get the care they need.

Strategic Plan (1st & 2nd Q’s 2006)

Effective May 1st, Patient Navigators will be stationed at the Hispanic Health Council, Hartford Hospital’s Emergency Room Department and at both of Hartford’s Federally Qualified Health Centers —Community Health Services and Charter Oak Health Center. In defining this new role, the MHCI Enrollment/ Patient Navigator Team has been responsive to the existing working culture and current protocols of Hartford’s safety net providers. The role of Patient Navigator has been designed to ensure the successful enrollment of all uninsured patients. Using the MHCI Enrollment Database System, the Patient Navigator will enroll patients, assign them a Medical Home, and provide each person with an ID card that identifies them as a member. A Patient Navigators Manager is already in place to monitor the success of this key component of the MHCI program of care. As the MHCI program grows, so will its Patient Navigator staff.

MEDICAL INTERPRETATION

Background

The delivery of quality and equitable health care suffers unless we overcome existing language and cultural barriers. These barriers block communication between medical providers and their patients. Connecticut does not have a certification or licensing process for language interpretation services. This has led to inconsistent and ineffective medical interpretation practices at the hospitals and health centers in Hartford including use of untrained volunteers, recruiting inappropriate staff to perform these functions, and often even relying on family members to interpret and convey critical medical information between patients and their caregivers.

Goal

The goal of MHCI Medical Interpretation is to overcome language and cultural barriers to better health care for the uninsured citizens of Hartford by providing consistent, professional, medical interpretation services.

Tactical Plan (1st & 2nd Q's 2006)

MHCI will partner with Capital Community College to contract a pilot instructional program. Students will complete a prescribed number of training hours focusing on knowledge of various cultural norms, competencies in medical terminologies and general language proficiencies. Initial classes will include one representative from each of the city's MHCI participating hospitals and Federally Qualified Health Centers. Each hospital and health center will then have a medically trained interpreter who will also oversee the further development of these essential services at their site including formalizing the oversight of practices. Three different training programs were reviewed and evaluated for the best fit with the MHCI project's goals and Capitol Community College is in negotiations to ensure delivery beginning Fall Semester 2006.

Strategic Plan (1st & 2nd Q's 2006)

An Interpreter Oversight Committee will be formed with representatives from participating hospitals and Federally Qualified Health Centers to launch a State Medical Interpretation Program. Among other tasks, the committee will work with state legislators to develop criteria for a formal State Certification of medical interpreters. The Medical Interpretation component of the MHCI program will champion the development, growth and evaluation of medical interpretation services in the City of Hartford.

INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Background

There is no systematic means for Hartford's five major health care providers to share patient information. Providers caring for a person seen at a hospital emergency department one day and a community health center the next, must rely upon the patient to detail the evaluation and treatment conducted at the other facility. Consequently, there is little formal coordination of care amongst Hartford safety-net providers. Patients often have incomplete information or understanding about their previous care, especially if they are not fluent in English, leading to redundant care, duplicate treatments and the possibility of medical errors.

Goal

The goal of MHCI is to design and implement an information system that will enable Hartford's safety net providers to share both demographic and clinical information for Hartford's uninsured residents.

Tactical Plan (1st & 2nd Q's 2006)

To accomplish this goal, the MHCI Information Systems Team has designed and developed a patient information database that will capture and store demographic information for Hartford's uninsured residents who enroll in the program. Initial clinical information will also be stored. A huge accomplishment during this period was also the review and evaluation of industry vendors, one of which will be chosen to implement the linking and sharing of medical data.

Strategic Plan (2nd & 3rd Q's 2006)

Effective May 1st, the MHCI Information Systems Team will be implementing an information system designed to enroll uninsured residents of Hartford in a program that will assign each patient a Medical Home, as well as provide them with a unique, personalized identification card. Hartford's safety net providers – both hospital clinics and Federally Qualified Health Centers will be able to access and share the demographic as well as clinical information of all of its enrollees. During the remainder of the year, MHCI will also publish a phased-approach to implementing a strategic solution that will encompass results of the vendor reviews and the collaborative effort between MHCI and the eHealth Connecticut Leadership Team. The objective is to work together to optimize health care delivery on behalf of Hartford residents as well as all citizens of the state of Connecticut.