Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

November 3, 2014

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHC Connect Receives MDCH Director's Award!

(Coldwater, MI) CHC Connect, the new school-based tele-health program available in Coldwater, Bronson and Quincy Junior and Senior High Schools, was the recipient of the Michigan Department of Community Health's Director's Award. The award was presented during the State of Michigan's 2014 Premier Public Health Conference on October 22nd. The program was recognized for its innovative use of technology to solve a community-wide school nursing shortage in a collaborative way. The project, headed by the Community Health Center of Branch County and in partnership with Branch County ISD, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Center and Coldwater, Bronson and Quincy Community schools, was one of three projects to receive this year's award.

From Left to Right: Kristin Smith, Director of Patient Experience, CHC; Theresa Christner, Health Education/Promotion Dir. BHSJ CHA; Theresa Gillette, School Tele-health Program Manager, CHC; Rochelle Bassage, School Tele-health Health Educator, BHSJ CHA; and Steve Todd, Health Officer, BHSJ CHA.

In operation for only nine months, CHC Connect has enrolled 875 students in three clinics and has provided over 1,200 tele-health linked services and nursing services to local students. According to Steve Todd, “Already the project is improving access to care for approximately 1/3rd of the junior and senior high school students attending these three schools.” The project, a grant recipient of the 2013 Transformational Healthcare Models for Children and Adolescents, is blazing a trail for other Michigan communities interested in addressing the school nursing shortage that currently exists in Michigan.

As part of the conference, staff from CHC and the health department presented information about the clinic, how it started and their progress to date. Kristin Smith, Director of Patient Experience and Administrator for the Project took the lead. She said “It was exciting to talk to so many people who were interested in the project and wanted to learn how they could replicate it in their own communities.” She went on to add “It’s an honor for the project to be recognized by the Michigan Department of Community Health as an important public health initiative. But even more so, it’s a privilege to be part of a community that can work together to make improvements when it sees a problem exists! These tele-health clinics use technology to build upon our current health care infrastructure to improve health care access for students by maximizing the existing health manpower resources we have – that’s important for rural communities!”

Through the project, students have access to school nurses for preventive care and health education. If needed, students can also ‘link’ up to a nurse practitioner or a pediatrician via the internet to the CHC Pediatric and Adolescent Center for primary care services, including illness and injury care and chronic disease management. By using a specialized electronic stethoscope and cameras that the nurse positions on the student, the provider can hear and see sounds and images with better clarity than those experienced in-person.

Theresa Gillette, Program Manager for the school-based tele-health clinics, states, “On a routine basis, we encounter ear infections, strep throat and a host of other childhood ailments. We have also seen our fair share of muscle strains, sprains and broken bones. But it’s our ability to provide early detection of potentially serious conditions, such as heart murmurs and heart irregularities which have increased my appreciation for the use of this innovative technology.” In addition to primary care, the

clinics provide preventive services, such as immunizations, sports physicals and can assist with signing up for health insurance through either Medicaid or the Healthcare Marketplace. This next year, the project will begin to focus on parent and youth engagement activities, as well.

To learn more about the CHC Connect project, how you can enroll your child or get personally involved, please contact Theresa Gillette (517) 279-5295 or follow us on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/pages/CHC-Cardinal-Connect/229463243911331.

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