

CONVERGE NEXT GENERATION eCONSULT CASE STUDY

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES



CHALLENGE:

As the second largest public health system in the nation, Los Angeles Department of Health Services (LADHS) serves over ten million low-income individuals, many with no insurance or on Medicaid. Within this safety net population, there have been significant barriers to patient access for specialty care, including:

- ▶ **Inconsistent protocols** for when and how to refer patients
- ▶ High numbers of **medically unnecessary specialty referrals**
- ▶ **Long wait times** for specialty appointments (of up to 12 months)
- ▶ **Patient transportation barriers** and the burden of multiple visits
- ▶ **Lack of communication and care coordination** between PCPs and specialists

In addition, the LADHS delivery network includes a large number of independently contracted Community Health Centers (CHCs), each with its own network of providers, unique processes and procedures, and varying levels of resources. Collectively, within this “multi-network” structure, disparities in specialty care access have had a significant impact on **health outcomes, patient experience,** and **healthcare costs.** While the problem of inequity within these safety net populations was obvious – the resolution was not.

As Mitchell Katz, M.D., Director of LADHS shared:

“HISTORICALLY, PATIENTS HAVE HAD TO WAIT A LONG TIME FOR SPECIALTY CARE APPOINTMENTS. SPECIALTY CARE IS VERY COSTLY... THE PROBLEM WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE TO FIX IF WE SOUGHT ONLY TO HIRE MORE SPECIALISTS.”

A possible solution was put forth from a team of LADHS physicians who had participated in the successful pilot of a technology-based specialty care triage system in San Francisco’s Public Health Department. With this proof-point in mind, Dr. Katz and his colleagues collaborated with the local Medicaid Health Plan (LA Care) and Safety Net Connect to champion the trial of a similar “eConsult” platform within the much larger LADHS system.



HOW CONVERGE WORKS

1

Electronic consultations or “eConsults” facilitate a care plan dialogue between medical, behavioral & social service providers.

2

Clinical tools streamline referrals, workflows and increase standardization with decision support.

3

Administrative features ensure automated execution for referral eligibility, scheduling, billing, & documentation for quality requirements.

SOLUTION:

To successfully address the complexities of specialty care access in a system of this scale, the Converge Next Generation eConsult solution incorporated three equally critical elements:

1. TECHNOLOGY:

For busy physicians inundated with new software systems, Converge offers an intuitive interface – with little to no learning curve. To maximize efficiency, built in clinical tools streamline referrals, workflows and increase standardization with decision support. While integrated administrative features ensure automated execution for everything from referral eligibility and scheduling, to billing and documentation for quality or certification requirements.

2. PROCESSES AND PROTOCOLS:

Since unqualified referrals result in additional backlogs, wait times, and missed appointments – the “when” and “how” to refer patients for specialty care is as important as the consultation itself. At LADHS, the referral process was complicated by multiple, sometimes conflicting referral criteria that varied between different internal departments and across the independent CHC facilities. Specialty working groups were convened to refine the referral process and establish protocols for use within the system.

3. EXPERT CONSULTATION AND IMPLEMENTATION:

Workflow redesign and buy-in from a diverse set of stakeholders (including the LADHS primary care and specialty providers – as well as the independently run CHCs) was necessary for successful implementation. The Safety Net Connect team of healthcare experts provided a hands-on consultative approach to achieve organization-wide adoption and a culture of collaboration on an unprecedented scale.

RESULTS:

Dr. Katz may state it best: **“The system is a win-win-win for LADHS. For our patients it means better access to specialty care, often without having to travel. For our primary care providers, it means rapid and direct communication with the specialist and updates on the best way to treat difficult problems. For our specialists, it means seeing the patients for whom they can add the most value.”**

As highlighted on the AHRQ Health Care Innovations Exchange, the initial 18-month pilot results **“reduced unnecessary specialty referrals, with a meaningful percentage of cases being resolved without a face-to-face visit”**, including:

- ▶ **46% OF ELECTRONIC CONSULTATIONS WERE RESOLVED WITHOUT A FACE-TO-FACE SPECIALIST**
- ▶ **60% REDUCTION IN THE AVERAGE WAIT TIME FOR A SPECIALTY APPOINTMENT**

Another valuable outcome of the pilot was **better communication and care coordination between specialists and PCPs** – improving the patient’s experience in their medical home. This peer-to-peer interaction also provided PCPs with hands-on continuing education and a broader scope of practice for clinical issues they could manage without the ongoing need for a specialist consult or referral. As Mary Franz from LA Care elaborated, **“eConsult is strengthening the collaborative relationship between primary care providers and specialists for the benefit of the patients.”**

These initial outcomes were so promising that LADHS has since expanded Converge to its entire network of primary care and specialty clinics, independently-operated CHCs, and County facilities, including the Department of Public Health (DPH), the Department of Mental Health (DMH), the Sheriff’s Department Medical Services Bureau (Jails), the Juvenile Court Health System (JCHS), and the Department of Health Services (DHS).

These locations can be envisioned together as a “Patient Centered Medical Neighborhood” providing:

- ▶ Reduced wait times for specialty care
- ▶ Less travel & fewer days off work
- ▶ More care received in culturally attuned medical home
- ▶ PCP more capable, empowered, and connected
- ▶ Fewer specialty visits required to develop treatment plan
- ▶ Better care coordination: smoother transitions and increased transparency
- ▶ Built-in standardization & structure
- ▶ Referred specialist visits are more focused and productive
- ▶ Whole Person Care

an award winning COLLABORATION:

This successful partnership has been recognized with the:

- ▶ **National Association of Counties Achievement Award** – for accomplishments in patient-centered specialty care.
- ▶ **Diamond ABBY Award for Innovations in HealthcareSM** from the Adaptive Business Leaders (ABL) Organization – for dramatically reducing the cost of quality healthcare.

AS OF Q1 2017, CONVERGE BOASTS:

629 LADHS, CHC & COMMUNITY PARTNERS SITES USING CONVERGE

3,208 PCPS AND SPECIALISTS INVOLVED

2.4 CALENDAR DAYS FOR THE AVERAGE SPECIALTY REVIEWER RESPONSE

93 SPECIALTY SERVICES AVAILABLE

592,258 eCONSULTS COMPLETED