

The Role of Practice Facilitators in Meeting the HIT Needs of Rural Practices

Ann Lefebvre, MSW, CPHQ; Mary McCaskill; Kristin Reiter, PhD; Jason Mose, MS, MBA, CHFP, PhD; Erin P. Fraher, PhD, MPP; Warren P. Newton, MD, MPH

Objective: To understand how practice facilitators enable rural and smaller practices to meet the evolving and increasing demands of health information technology (HIT).

Data/Setting/Design/Methods: This case study of North Carolina used bivariate and multivariate analyses to evaluate the skills, knowledge and effectiveness of practice facilitators in helping small, rural practices meet the requirements of Meaningful Use.

Results: Results suggest that deploying practice facilitators into smaller, rural practices in North Carolina may have helped to bridge skill gaps and support practices in achieving meaningful use performance measures. Findings suggest that effective practice facilitators have training and experience within a traditional healthcare profession, however, additional training is necessary to allow them to assist small, rural practices in meeting the evolving HIT demands of the health care system.

Conclusions: Small, rural ambulatory care practices often lack resources to hire new staff or develop new skills in their existing staff to meet the demands of increasing use of health information technology. A model that builds upon the practice facilitator's experience in a healthcare profession, and allows them to access continuous learning opportunities enables practices to retrain members of their existing workforce who can assist in training other providers and staff in small, rural practices.

Key Words: Health information technology, practice facilitation, retrained workforce, rural, primary care, meaningful use, NC AHEC

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