

DOC-University Rx Project Yields Big Savings—and Award—in Rhode Island

Saving an estimated \$12 million over the course of a seven-year program is sweet enough. It was the cherry on top when the Pharmacy Benefit Management Institute honored the collaboration that produced those savings with its 2009 Rx Benefit Award, which recognizes innovation in pharmacy management.

The initiative is a joint effort between the Rhode Island Department of Corrections and the University of Rhode Island's College of Pharmacy. In its award announcement, PBMI said the two entities "are pioneering a new higher education/state agency management model." This is the first time the institute has honored a collaboration involving a university or college and a state agency.

Since its inception in 2002, the collaborative management model has enabled RIDOC to reduce medication waste by nearly 75% and to hold the trend line on expenditures despite significant drug cost inflation and increases in the inmate population.

"Our 2009 award recipients have differentiated themselves from industry norms with creative new approaches," said Dana Felthouse, president of PBMI, which helps health care benefit executives work with pharmacy benefit managers and other pharmacy professionals to design prescription drug benefit programs. "Another hallmark of the winners is a passion for collaboration among stakeholders. The solutions are programs that demonstrate success in improving pharmaceutical health care, as well as curbing costs."

Then and Now

The situation was not so rosy 10 years ago, when the Department of Corrections operated an on-site pharmacy staffed with state employees, says Joseph Marocco, MPA, CCHP, RIDOC's associate director of health care services. It was difficult to recruit and retain staff for several reasons, including a national shortage of pharmacists and correctional salaries that did not match those in the community. To try to keep up with the growing demands of a growing inmate population, contract pharmacists were often used, at a hefty cost.

To remedy those problems, in 2000 RIDOC decided to outsource pharmacy services. Although that was a definite improvement, the prison system's health administrators wanted to get a better handle on overall pharmacy management. "We wanted to make sure we were looking at the

whole picture: our formulary, who was on what meds and why, cost analysis and cost-saving measures, plus reporting on all of this," Marocco explains.

Again they turned to outside expertise. After a competitive bidding process, the agency awarded URI's College of Pharmacy a three-year, \$454,000 contract in 2002 to manage its pharmacy program using pharmacy benefit management strategies. The new approach was a success, and the

two organizations are now in the midst of a four-year, \$682,000 contract.

Today, pharmacy services are managed jointly by the College of Pharmacy's Healthcare Utilization Management Center and RIDOC medical staff. The college provides an on-site pharmacy manager and extensive data analysis, reporting, clinical support and management resources. Pharmacy students assist with much of the data analysis. Prescription fulfillment is done via contract with CPS (Contract Pharmacy Services Inc.) using an



Displaying the 2009 Rx Benefit Award are Matt Coty, URI pharmacy student, and Rita Marcoux, URI assistant professor of pharmacy research. Also present (L-R): student Brian Touhey; Michael Poshkus, RIDOC medical director; E. Paul Larrat, associate dean, URI College of Pharmacy; Joseph Marocco, RIDOC associate director of health care services; and Larry Myerson, the URI on-site pharmacy manager. (photo credit: URI/Michael Salerno)

electronic pharmacy order system.

The results speak for themselves. RIDOC's daily population averages 3,800 inmates and annual admissions are 18,000 per year. Based on pharmaceutical trend data, the system's medication costs had been projected to be \$13.7 million from 2003 through 2006, but its actual costs were \$8.8 million. Total overall savings have climbed to \$12 million as the program has matured, according to E. Paul Larrat, associate dean of the College of Pharmacy and HUMC codirector, along with Rita Marcoux, an assistant professor of pharmacy research.

This is an impressive feat given the growth in inmate numbers, the changing demographics and health problems among the patient population, and rising drug prices, says Marocco.

Rx for Quality

RIDOC relies on the college pharmacy experts and students for medication quality review, says medical director Michael Poshkus, MD, CCHP. This includes help with quality assurance programs and review of medication use as well as any medication errors that may occur.

Poshkus appreciates having pharmacy experts to consult "whenever we have a question about ordering medica-

tions and what would be the most cost-effective means to provide pharmaceuticals to our patient population." He also values the work of the students. "Their projects involve reviewing our utilization of different drugs and helping us come up with protocols that allow us to better utilize medications for our populations."

Marocco adds that the program has improved his department's relationship with the state Board of Pharmacy by helping the board understand the complexities of correctional pharmacy care. "It's not a nursing home; it's not a hospital; it's not an ambulatory care center. It's a little bit of everything."

Larrat says it is unusual to apply pharmacy benefit management strategies to a group like RIDOC. "One of the things that has impressed me ... is the team atmosphere. We were very welcomed by the medical team a few years back. That's helped with access to information and our ability to educate the staff about pharmaceutical care, which hopefully filters down to better care and treatment of the inmates."

Fostering Future Pharmacists

Both Poshkus and Marocco praise the work of the URI pharmacy students and are pleased that the prison setting can serve as a teaching facility for them. Indeed, Marcoux says PBMI was "very excited that we are taking this opportunity to introduce students to a part of pharmacy that often, students are not aware of. They are gaining experience that prepares them for jobs that many organizations in the health care industry are seeking."

Although the students who work on the project do sometimes visit the prison facilities, they spend most of their time on URI campus analyzing data and prescription trends. "I reviewed utilization of emergency prescriptions to see where we can maximize the effectiveness of the ordering system," says Matt Coty, who graduated in May after completing his six-year doctor of pharmacy degree. He says the program is important because "everybody deserves appropriate medications, and they should be treated just as any other individual would be treated."

Brian Touhey, who also graduated in May with a doctorate in pharmacy, says he would encourage other pharmacy students to make this one of their rotations. "Part of it was being on campus analyzing the numbers and then coming here to see it all come to fruition. This helped me not only with my clinical judgment, but my personal judgment as well... You have to use your professional judgment, your clinical judgment, put everything else aside and do your best for them."

This article was written by CorrectCare editor Jaime Shimkus using information provided by the University of Rhode Island as well as by Joseph Marocco, MPA, CCHP, RIDOC's associate director of health care services.

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