

MAHEC Launches Virtual Training for Rural Primary Care Providers

Project ECHO® removes barriers to delivering specialty care in rural Western North Carolina



Project ECHO® (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) is a lifelong learning and guided practice model developed at the University of New Mexico to reduce barriers to specialty care in rural areas. The hub-and-spokes training model brings together an interdisciplinary team of healthcare specialists at a learning hub to share information in real-time with area primary care providers via multi-site web conferencing.

The upcoming video teleconference series for school nurses will consist of hour-long modules on relevant topics including diabetes management, seizure disorders, hypertension, asthma, mental health, dermatology, motivational interviewing, and screening and referral for treatment. Nurses will have opportunities to explore and get guidance on actual patient cases.

MAHEC's Project ECHO® coordinator Lourdes Lorenz-Miller and Dr. Susan Alexander facilitate the first virtual clinic on Type II diabetes for MAHEC's rural fellows with medical expertise provided by MAHEC's Dr. Benjamin Gilmer.

On December 6, school nurses across Western North Carolina will have the opportunity to train with the region's top healthcare experts without ever having to leave their office thanks to a new medical education program being offered by the Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC). The Project ECHO® for School Nurses video teleconference series is the second teleECHO™ in WNC.

The first ECHO® series launched in November with a Type II diabetes clinic to support MAHEC's rural family medicine fellows practicing in Haywood, Macon, Mitchell, Swain and Yancey counties. Upcoming sessions for these rural physicians will focus on a variety of topics including autoimmune diseases, sports medicine, Hepatitis C, and substance use disorders.

"This technology helps us bridge the distance between our rural fellows, share vital information, and build a supportive cohort," shares Benjamin Gilmore, MD, MAHEC family physician and rural fellowship advisor. "These virtual clinics allow us to bring healthcare specialists to the doors of each fellow remotely."

MAHEC is one of only three academic health centers in North Carolina offering these innovative trainings. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates a Project ECHO® on medication-assisted therapy in which MAHEC participates and provides perinatal substance use treatment expertise.

"I'm excited that school nurses across our region can get the training they need to support the students who walk into their office every day," shares Alice Elio, MSN, School Health Program Manager at MAHEC.

Project ECHO® offers accessible opportunities for providers to benefit from healthcare experts

"MAHEC's Project ECHO® offers very accessible opportunities for rural schools to benefit from healthcare experts in planning and providing care for students with special needs," she explains.

Future MAHEC ECHO® series will address chronic pain management, mental health, and complex conditions. These trainings are being designed to support rural primary care providers including physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, behavioral health specialists, and pharmacists.

Project ECHO® participant Dr. Kelly Garcia appreciates the case-based learning these series offer. "As I'm transitioning out of residency, opportunities for formal learning are fewer, especially for those of us in rural areas."

For more information about the Project ECHO® learning model and other upcoming series, please contact Lourdes Lorenz-Miller, RN, MSN, at 828-257-4758 or Lourdes.Lorenz-Miller@mahec.net. 