

People's Health Centers, Inc., Doubles their Retinal Eye Exams

Issue:

Eye exams, foot exams, and flu vaccinations are the most often neglected preventive care among those with diabetes (1). Diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of blindness in the United States (2). Because of the microvascular effects of high blood glucose on the vessels in the retina, leaking or edema of the retina can occur (3). The mean level of glucose in the blood is an important predictor of retinopathy (4). The progression of diabetic retinopathy can be slowed by intensive glycemic and blood pressure control (3). Laser photocoagulation can also be used to reduce loss of vision.

It has been shown that a four-hour training course for non-ophthalmologist physicians, in recognition and management of diabetic retinopathy, can reduce failure to detect preproliferative and proliferative retinopathy from 60 percent to 15 percent and reduce failure to detect and appropriately refer maculopathy from 83 percent to 15.6 percent (5). Health centers in Canada have conducted retinal exams using a nonmydriatic camera with evaluation performed through telemedical imaging (6). People's Health Centers, Inc. of St. Louis, Mo., took the next step.

Intervention:

People's Health Centers, Inc., hired an optometrist for eight months in 2007 for onsite optometry services.

Impact:

The monthly count of diabetes registry patients receiving retinal eye exams increased ten- to twenty-fold from April to December 2007. People's Health Centers, Inc., doubled their dilated retinal eye exams of clients in their diabetes registry, from March 2005 to May 2008, from 21 percent to 44 percent, bringing them closer to the Health Resources and Services Administration's goal of 70 percent and exceeding both national and regional rates (Fig. 1).

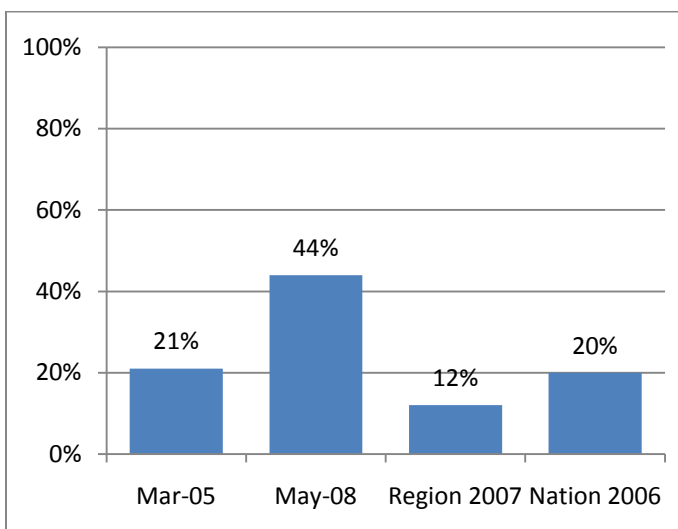


Figure 1. Prevalence of dilated retinal eye exams among diabetes registry participants at People's Health Centers, Inc. (March 2005, May 2008), and the regional cluster (Region 2007) and National Health Disparities Collaborative (Nation 2006).

References:

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