

Avera St. Luke's Aberdeen, SD 2013 Implementation Strategy

Introduction:

The Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) is a new IRS reporting requirement for nonprofit hospitals. Under the Affordable Care Act, tax-exempt hospitals must conduct a CHNA every three years. The assessment must take into account input from persons who represent the broad interests of the community including those with special knowledge or expertise in public health.

At Avera St. Luke's, the CHNA is understood as more than an IRS requirement. Through the CHNA, the hospital can further its mission to improve the lives and health of people within the community. The CHNA process collects and evaluates public health data and also connects with the local people to learn more about the health need concerns of the community. This whole process provides direction for strategic planning and priority setting to assist the hospital in developing targeted programs to meet identified community health needs. The assessment is an essential aspect in maintaining Avera St. Luke's mission while following the values of Compassion, Hospitality, and Stewardship in our everyday work.

Define Community:

Hospital discharge data for 2011 revealed that 61% (3,600 of 5,890 discharges) of Avera St. Luke's hospital discharges originated from Brown County. The next largest percent of discharges came from Spink County at 7%. The remaining 32% of discharges are spread over some 40 counties in South Dakota and 28 different states in the United States. For this reason, Avera St. Luke's chose to focus on Brown County because it would provide the most representative data of which Avera St. Luke's serves and more accurately assess the health of the Avera St. Luke's community. Therefore, the Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) was conducted by Avera St. Luke's for approximately 37,331 residents in Brown County, its primary service area. Avera St. Luke's serves as the county's largest integrated health care facility.

Assessment Process:

Avera St. Luke's Hospital collected both primary and secondary data for the CHNA. In late April 2012, Avera St. Luke's conducted five focus groups representing community leaders and members, health care providers, uninsured/underinsured persons and policy makers in order to discuss health care needs and concerns in Brown County. The hospital invited a vast array of individuals from all facets of the community to participate in the focus groups and over 35 individuals attended.

The groups were facilitated by a retired school administrator in the community. The following questions were asked of each focus group:

- What health care services are most important to you?

- What is the most pressing health care-related need facing your family?
- What is the most pressing health care-related need facing your community?
- If you don't go to the doctor or hospital, why?
- In what ways are the hospital and/or health care in Brown County serving the community well?
- In what ways could the hospital and/or health care in Brown County improve the way in which it serves the community?
- If you could add or change one aspect of health care in Brown County, what would it be and why?

The questions were asked and replies were recorded in a consistent and statistical structure throughout the study. The facilitator assisted each group with prioritizing the needs they defined from highest to lowest. After all of the groups concluded their meetings, these prioritization lists were compiled and analyzed by Avera St. Luke's to develop a master prioritization list. The following key themes presented themselves:

- Dental Care
- Health Care Affordability
- Access to Health Care Specialists
- Preventive Care and Education
- Chronic Disease Care
- Travel and Accessibility to Care

Review of Key Themes:

Based on the identified key themes, the hospital began reviewing and assessing its current involvement to determine future steps to address the identified community health needs. Each area of concern was equally studied in depth in order to assess the hospital's current involvement or lack thereof.

Dental Care:

Avera St. Luke's Hospital provides the coordination and space necessary for the Delta Dental van to provide services to area children. Delta Dental is a nonprofit organization that offers national dental coverage. For two weeks about 3-4 times a year, the Delta Dental van coordinates with Avera St. Luke's and provides dental services for children out of their fully-equipped dental van. Unfortunately, there is currently no such program for adults and most local dentists neither accept Medicaid patients nor provide emergency services on weekends or evenings.

Healthcare Affordability:

Avera St. Luke's does many things in order to help with health care affordability. The Social Services Department provides assistance to those unable to pay for services and the Business Office assists patients as needed in setting up payment plans. In addition, through our Financial Assistance policy, which includes charity care, Avera St. Luke's forgave over \$4.7 million in patient bills in fiscal year 2012.

Access to Health Care Specialists:

Avera St. Luke's currently offers 27 physician specialties locally. The Avera St. Luke's physician recruiter works on an ongoing basis to recruit additional specialists as needed. This includes working with other recruiters across the Avera system to collaborate where possible.

Avera St. Luke's also has access to *eConsult* services. *eConsult* is a program facilitated by the Avera Health system that uses cutting edge technology to provide access to specialty services in rural facilities through two-way video technology. Over 70 different providers in a vast array of sub-specialties provide *eConsult* services to rural areas that otherwise would not have access to that specialized level of care. In fiscal year 2012, over 1,200 consults were performed at Avera St. Luke's by 13 different specialists.

Preventive Care and Education:

Avera St. Luke's currently has numerous programs that provide preventive care and health education opportunities to the community.

- Community screenings for prostate cancer are held at least annually at minimal cost.
- Comprehensive heart screenings are available on an ongoing basis at minimal cost.
- Ongoing work is being done with five area Hutterite colonies to assist them in improving the health of their colony members.
- Through the Business Health Department, Avera St. Luke's participates in several business health fairs, providing health screenings, heel scans for bone density, etc.
- Freedom Fitness, a program offered to patients who have completed physical therapy and want to continue to exercise on their own, is available at a minimal charge.
- Annual Diabetic Education event provided at no charge to the community which includes educational talks by our physicians and dietitians.
- Physicians and clinical staff present educational talks at the monthly "Walk for Wellness" program at the local mall.
- Several different childbirth classes are offered on an ongoing basis. There is a minimum charge for the classes, but no one is turned away because of inability to pay.
- Annual community heart education event is held featuring a variety of heart related topics presented by our cardiologists. Charge to participants is minimal to assist in covering our costs.
- Free community health forums are held periodically and presented by our healthcare providers and other professionals.
- Every year our health care professionals present topics such as bike safety, good nutrition, poison prevention, and alcohol and drug prevention to area school students.

- Avera St. Luke's participates in cancer prevention education through an annual breast cancer awareness educational display at Lakewood Mall and participation in our local Relay for Life event.
- Avera St. Luke's provides several educational opportunities for medical professionals throughout the region. These range from CPR classes, EMT/paramedic certification, ACLS and PALS courses, and conferences for such as the annual Cancer Conference.

Avera St. Luke's believes that providing community education opportunities are part of our Mission. In fiscal year 2012, approximately 11,000 people participated in one of our many programs. Avera St. Luke's estimates the benefit of these educational opportunities to be approximately \$325,000 annually. Based on the feedback from the focus groups, we will review and improve upon how we inform the community of these opportunities.

Chronic Disease Care:

Avera St. Luke's currently provides both support and care facilities for the chronically ill in the following ways:

- Our Kidney Dialysis Unit serves many area patients with chronic kidney failure. In fiscal year 2012, 90 patients received over 8,500 dialysis treatments.
- Behavioral Health Services provides care and treatment to many chronically mentally ill patients. This inpatient service was able to care for 560 patients in fiscal year 2012.
- Worthmore Addiction Services provided outpatient care and treatment to over 1,500 clients in fiscal year 2012.
- Home Health, Palliative Care, and Hospice services are available to patients as appropriate. In fiscal year 2012 over 400 patients throughout the region took advantage of these services.
- The following support groups are offered through Avera St. Luke's free of charge:
 - Diabetes Support Group – average 8 attendees per month
 - Parkinson's Support Group – average 20 attendees per month
 - Stroke Support Group – average 12 attendees per month
 - Grieving Parents Support Group – average 6 attendees per month

Travel and Accessibility to Health Care:

Since Brown County is a rural area, Avera St. Luke's needs to be able to provide accessible health care to many people outside of the city as well as be available to accept patients at any time of day because of travel complications. Following are ways in which we currently address the travel and accessibility to health care problem:

- Avera St. Luke's monetarily supports the Aberdeen Ride Line service as well as the Groton Community Transit service for patients who have no transportation to doctor appointments, etc.

- Two FastCare clinics are located in Aberdeen to provide after hours and weekend care to help meet basic healthcare needs of individuals. In fiscal year 2012, over 116,000 patients were seen in the FastCare clinics.
- Our Emergency Room, which is open and staffed with a physician 24-hours a day, saw over 14,700 patients in fiscal year 2012.
- Avera St. Luke's helicopter service is available 24 hours a day and logged 232 flights in fiscal year 2012.
- Avera St. Luke's manages two critical access hospitals in the area—Eureka Community Health Services and Marshall County Healthcare Center in Britton.
- Avera St. Luke's operates primary clinics in Britton, Groton, Ipswich, and Selby, SD, as well as Ellendale, ND. In fiscal year 2012, combined clinic visits exceeded 158,000 for these 5 clinics.
- Avera Medical Group physicians representing six different specialties travel to eight communities within our region on a monthly basis to provide clinic services locally.
- eConsult services are available to patients here and in our outreach areas to reduce time and travel for patients. In fiscal year 2012, over 1,200 patient visits were seen at Avera St. Luke's via eConsult.
- Home Health, Palliative Care, and Hospice services are available to patients as appropriate. In fiscal year 2012 over 400 patients throughout the region took advantage of these services.
- The Auxiliary Guest House is available at a low price for those patients and families who need overnight stays and can't afford to stay in a hotel. In Fiscal Year 2012, the House hosted 309 guests for a total of 1,039 nights.

Health Needs Determined Through Data Collection:

After consultation with various health professionals concerning the above mentioned themes, the three major areas initially highlighted for further research and comparison were dental care, health care affordability and travel and accessibility to health care. This decision was based on the severity of the issue, our current involvement in these areas and our professional outlook.

When further research and discussion occurred regarding the key themes of affordability and travel and accessibility to health care, it was determined that Avera St. Luke's already provides assistance as able to the community. The hospital will however review those areas to ensure its programs align with the identified needs and look for areas of opportunity to increase the public's awareness.

Therefore, it was determined that the focus of our efforts will center on the key theme of dental care and, more specifically, dental care for adults that are either uninsured or underinsured.

Priority Recommendation – Dental Care:

The largest problem concerning dental care in our service area has to do with the lack of availability of dental providers for adults who do not carry dental insurance. Additionally, there are not enough dentists in our area that provide care for those patients on Medicaid or other

government-run health care programs. This is shown by the number of patients who have to access an emergency department for dental care instead of going to a dentist where they would have been turned away because of lack of insurance. Nationally, over 800,000 emergency department visits in the United States were related to a primary diagnosis of a preventable dental condition. At Avera St. Luke', our reports indicate that approximately 120 patients came into the emergency department with dental concerns in the last year. Of those, roughly 90% were aged 21 or older. Adult patients are being focused on for our report because there are already programs in place that offer dental care for people without dental insurance up to age 20.

Dental care is usually not a major focus of a hospital, but we feel that the lack of access to dental care by adults who do not have dental insurance has become an issue in our service area that cannot be overlooked. Dental issues, if not resolved, can lead to other, more serious, health concerns. There are approximately 120 known physical illnesses that can be detected through an oral exam. The American Diabetes Association indicates that "not only are people with diabetes more susceptible to serious gum disease, but serious gum disease may have the potential to affect blood glucose control and contribute to the progression of diabetes." Poor dental health can also prohibit patients from getting other important medical care they may need. For example, a patient that needed a heart procedure could not have it done safely until he had received dental work to treat his infected gums and teeth. Because he didn't have insurance, he was unable to find dental assistance until it became a crisis and Avera St. Luke's Social Services was able to intervene and find the appropriate help.

Only 25% of people in South Dakota carry dental insurance, and most are offered this choice through employer insurance plans. In an effort to understand the problem of uninsured patients needing more dental care available in our area, it is helpful to look at state and national data, such as the amount of Medicaid being utilized and how many emergency room visits concerning dental occur. In South Dakota, the number of Medicaid visits has been on the incline along with the number of claims being paid. This results in the statement that as Medicaid increases in popularity, so does the importance of paying off Medicaid claims.

However, our hospital reports have shown no decline in the number of patients coming through our emergency room with dental concerns that could have been taken care of at a dental office. We would expect the number of emergency room visits to decline based the increased usage of the Medicaid dental program. This is not the case for our service area. The Medicaid dental programs appear to be gaining support around South Dakota, but Brown County doesn't seem to have caught on just yet. Brown County needs more dentists who accept Medicaid or more programs with a focus on adult patients without dental insurance whether through education, actual care, or both.

Implementation Plan:

Our implementation strategy will focus on education regarding the importance of good dental health as well as improving access to preventive dental care. Avera St. Luke's, as a hospital, feels it is important not only to heal the sick but to keep the community in good health with the hope that people will rarely have to reach a hospital setting for health concerns. Stopping an issue before it becomes a worse problem is key to alleviating the concerns we heard from our

focus group participants. Because Avera St. Luke's does not employ any dentists, we feel the biggest way we can impact this issue is through education and preventive care. We can measure our success by reducing the number of emergency room visits by dental patients and providing and tracking the dental educational opportunities we engage in. We are confident that we can make an impact on adult dental health and that this will improve the overall health of our community.

After numerous meetings and research, we have come up with a number of steps to begin moving forward on our plan to improve education of and access to adult dental health. The subsequent points are details of Avera St. Luke's plan:

- Investigate a partnership with dentists in Brown County to determine how we can work together to improve dental care.
 - Facilitate a collaborative conversation with dentists and other stakeholders. With this, provide data (both quantitative and anecdotal) as to the issues uninsured adults face when dealing with dental concerns.
- Explore whether other local service and educational organizations have interest in partnering to improve dental care.
 - Facilitate a conversation to discuss as well as take an inventory of current efforts that are occurring.
- Develop an educational program to present at health fairs, local service clubs, etc.
 - Educational materials to include information about proper dental care and consequences of poor care.
- Investigate initiating a dental health campaign for the area through:
 - Business Health contacts
 - School contacts
 - Senior living contacts
 - Brown County Welfare contacts
 - Other agencies as necessary and appropriate

Avera St. Luke's is committed to working with local dentists and community agencies to improve dental care accessibility and affordability for the uninsured adult population living within our service area.

Board Approval:

This report was prepared for and approved by the Avera St. Luke's Board of Directors on June 4, 2013.