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MaineHealth ACO Awarded \$70K for Improving Pediatric Referral Process

(Portland, ME) The MaineHealth Accountable Care Organization (MaineHealth ACO) has been awarded a 70K grant to improve communication across pediatric and family medicine practices through the standardization of pediatric specialist referrals. The grant, awarded by Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, will support a project focused on streamlining the pediatric referral process by standardizing the way in which pediatric primary care providers (PCPs) refer patients to pediatric specialists and how specialists, in turn, support primary care.

This project is an example of MaineHealth ACO's work supporting the implementation of Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH) across its participating 10 hospitals/regions in Maine and parts of New Hampshire. PCMH is a care delivery model, which establishes primary care as the main pillar of patient care with additional support provided by the surrounding medical neighborhood, including specialists. This coordination often occurs through referral for services when the PCP seeks advice from specialists for specific diagnoses and treatment.

With cases of over- and under-referring, long wait times for appointments, and instances of poor transfers of information between PCPs and specialists, MaineHealth ACO participating practices have several opportunities to improve the referral process. The MaineHealth ACO will use the grant to standardize the referral process by assembling a team of primary care providers and specialists who will create easy-to-use clinical referral decision-making guidelines and standard pediatric specialty referral forms. These tools will not only identify when and how PCPs should refer, but will also address information and communication gaps between PCPs and specialists.

"We are so pleased to be awarded this year-long grant from Harvard Pilgrim," said Dr. Jeffrey Aalberg, Chief Medical Officer of the MaineHealth ACO, "Bringing pediatric specialists and PCPs together with their unique understanding of the referral process is critical to the success of this project and is an example of how true collaboration in healthcare can be very effective."

In time, the new pediatric specialist referral process will be expanded to additional pediatric specialty and primary care offices across the MaineHealth ACO system and the state. A longer-term goal is to standardize a similar specialty referral process at the adult patient population level to reduce unwarranted variation in primary care referrals to specialists.

About MaineHealth Accountable Care Organization

The MaineHealth ACO is an integrated and collaborative network of over 1,400 physicians, hospitals and other healthcare providers, both within and independent of the MaineHealth system, with a shared vision of becoming the leader in supporting value-based, integrated health care. They are dedicated to improving healthcare in Maine and New Hampshire by achieving quality measures, improving the patient experience and reducing healthcare costs. For more information, visit www.mainehealthaco.org.