

# Essentia Health East Improves Treatment of Tobacco Dependence

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Between October 2010 and June 2012, ClearWay Minnesota<sup>SM</sup> provided Essentia Health East's Duluth Heart and Vascular Center with funding and technical assistance to further integrate best-practice tobacco dependence treatment within three Essentia Health clinics.

Essentia Health focused on its Duluth, West Duluth and Hermantown clinics, as well as one clinic in Virginia, Minnesota, which together serve over 460,000 residents of northeastern Minnesota.



During the 21-month grant period, the systems-change team worked to implement standardized tobacco user identification, documentation, brief intervention and referral processes, based on best practices in tobacco cessation.



**Essentia Health**  
Here with you

**ClearWay**<sup>SM</sup>  
MINNESOTA

# Bringing Tobacco Dependence Treatment to the Forefront

## Standardizing patient intervention

ClearWay Minnesota funding allowed Essentia Health to emphasize the importance of addressing tobacco use in outpatient and inpatient clinical settings as a way to reduce tobacco's disease burden and negative health outcomes.

The Essentia Health team established a standard tobacco cessation patient intervention, based on the *United States Public Health Service Guideline, Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence – 2008 Update*, otherwise known as the "5 A's" model.

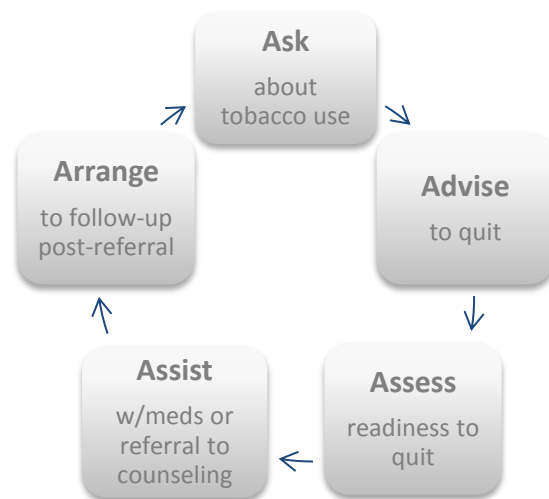
The goal of the new policy is for clinicians to systematically assess and document tobacco use status in the clinic's electronic medical record (EMR) for every patient at every visit.

Other key provisions of the policy include: documenting care plans in every tobacco user's medical record; providing additional evidence-based treatment (either through brief in-office counseling with a medical

provider, referral to Essentia Health East's Tobacco-Free Services or referral to resources such as a telephone tobacco quitline or stop-smoking web program); and providing nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) as appropriate.

While the policy created a standard intervention, Essentia Health realized that there could not be one standard protocol for all clinics as each clinic operates a bit differently.

Team members met with certified medical assistants (CMAs) at each clinic and asked, "What would work best for you so that the doctor knows this patient is a smoker and is ready to



quit?" The feedback they received helped tailor trainings on new protocols and procedures within each setting.

### **Bridging primary and specialty care**

Under the new tobacco treatment intervention protocols, primary care providers screen patients for tobacco use, advise them to quit and assess their readiness to quit. Additional brief counseling is either delivered by the primary care provider, or referrals are made to additional face-to-face counseling at Tobacco-Free Services within the Essentia Health Heart and Vascular Center (or one of seven other Tobacco-Free Services sites).

According to the Essentia Health Duluth team, primary care providers were on board with implementing the new protocols, as screening and treatment of tobacco dependence is part of health care quality measures, such as the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS) Meaningful Use measures. Providers requested and were provided with 5 A's prescribing information screens within the EMR to facilitate their tobacco treatment and referral efforts.

### **Standardizing inpatient treatment**

An additional priority for the Essentia Health team was to standardize identification and intervention within St. Mary's Medical Center, following Joint Commission Performance Measures pertaining to treatment and follow-up of hospitalized patients. If in the future the hospital decides to adopt these measures, or they become mandatory, appropriate processes would already be in place.

Currently, admission order sets at Essentia Health St. Mary's Medical Center include orders for NRT and referral to Tobacco-Free Services. Discharge order sets include smoking cessation information and resources. Providers can page cessation counselors from Essentia's Tobacco-Free Services who will meet with patients during their hospital stay.

In the future, St. Mary's Medical Center hopes to have a dedicated certified tobacco treatment specialist on staff and a system whereby counseling staff can review current inpatient lists of tobacco users and contact patients about cessation treatment during their hospital stay, as well as after discharge.

## **Employing the EMR to monitor performance**

In addition to new tobacco treatment-specific EMR drop-down menus (“smart sets”), the Essentia Health team worked closely with IT staff to develop new EMR reporting capabilities to monitor discrete data points (such as number of patients

screened for tobacco use, provided with brief intervention and referred to additional counseling). Monthly reports are generated and provided to each manager so he or she may continue monitoring staff and provider performance on tobacco-related measures.

## **Keys to System-Change Success**

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### **Commitment from key leadership**

Essentia Health recognized that executive support was a key to success. The team worked diligently to garner support for their tobacco dependence treatment efforts, including providing face-to-face treatment services.

Terrence C. Clark, M.D., a former pulmonologist and passionate tobacco treatment champion, played a key role. Dr. Clark met with senior administrators at Essentia Health East and garnered funding for continued tobacco treatment services through Essentia’s Community Care Program. This funding has allowed Tobacco-Free Services staff to provide cessation services to Essentia patients for free. Additionally, through the leadership

of Ron Seibert, the Director of the Heart and Vascular Center, additional funding was allotted from the cardiology department budget to provide low-cost NRT to patients.

“The top executives of Essentia Health East were committed to having a readily accessible tobacco cessation program for all patients in our area.”

*-Nancy Gilbert, R.N., St. Mary’s systems-change team member*

### **Empowered, multi-disciplinary teams**

Essentia Health Duluth established a multi-disciplinary team to work on tobacco systems-change efforts. The team included the program manager, the director of the Heart and Vascular Center, the vice president of the

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The multi-disciplinary team allowed different perspectives to be voiced and considered during planning and implementation. The team laid out a plan, set priorities, divided up the work and met regularly throughout the 21-month funding period. Although staffing changes in the middle of the funding period did occur, the team was able to reorganize and stay on track with its system and stay on track with its system change goals.

## **Commitment to serving the community**

Intervening with tobacco use dependence goes hand in hand with the mission of Essentia Health System: to “make a healthy difference in people’s lives.” This is part of the system’s original Benedictine values of taking care of the sick and poor above all else.

## **Initiative impact**

As a result of Essentia Health’s systems change efforts, patients will be routinely screened for tobacco use and will be more likely to receive assistance quitting tobacco. The more assistance patients receive, the more likely they will attempt to quit or be able to quit successfully. Quitting tobacco use will greatly improve the health of patients, while, in turn, reducing costs associated with treating tobacco-related illnesses.

“We really feel we owe this to our community. . . . It’s our responsibility. . . . If we’re not doing this sort of work, why are we here? Treating tobacco use dependence is the right thing to do for our patients.”

-- Ron Seibert, Director of St. Mary’s Heart and Vascular Center