Health Partners Back Country

HealthPartners, a Minnesota-based healthcare provider, is continually striving to provide high quality and consistent care throughout its service area. This requires that all healthcare staff receive on-going quality education. As new and effective treatments are developed, HealthPartners works to develop and implement effective training strategies.

Back Pain, a chronic condition that presents in many patients, is one area where a new treatment protocol was developed. History had shown that many back pain patients were being treated for each episode rather than having a history developed and the condition treated as chronic. A back pain treatment protocol was developed at HealthPartners by the in-house treatment staff.

Seeking a new and effective training format, HealthPartners partnered with Seward Inc. to develop a 60 to 90 minute long individualized, self-paced eLearning event centered on the new paradigm for the treatment of patients with back pain. The primary audience for the training is Primary Care Providers within the HealthPartners system, including physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants. The eLearning supports the following desired outcomes:

- Integration of the critical elements of pain management into primary care across HealthPartners Clinics
- Development of a standardized approach to treating back pain across all clinics which will include:
  - Early identification of chronic pain
  - Standardized methods of evaluating
  - Appropriate use of imaging based upon examination and history

HealthPartners decided to use a metaphor in the eLearning event to help provide the context that relates to the new paradigm for pain treatment. Metaphors can help learners grasp new content and draw on similarities from other real world experiences as well as provide an intuitive understanding of an object, process, skill, etc., and initiate a process of active learning. Seward and HealthPartners worked together to gather and synthesize information about the new paradigm for back pain treatment, which drove the development of the metaphor. The key elements of the new paradigm for pain treatment include:

- Treatment and care are cyclical (including 1st, 2nd, 3rd visits and beyond)
- Identifies predictors for pain treatment and care
- Rules out bad disease early in treatment
- Focuses on examining all aspects of the pain problem to uncover any missing elements and expose any underlying issues
- Identifies a care team that includes two roles in addition to the M.D., nursing and medical office staff — the Trained Spinal Therapist and the Behavioral Health Therapist
- Identifies the importance of the team approach and collaborative work and incorporates team accountability for patient care
- Defines the relationship between the team and patient
HealthPartners chose the metaphor of a back country wilderness canoe trip. Each member of the care team is integrated into the metaphor as key person in the expedition. The canoe trip metaphor represents a patient and primary care provider-focused journey. In this context, the training provides outcomes for healing and education about healthy lifestyle choices for the patient. It also provides outcomes for an increased confidence in the care and treatment of patients, the ability to perform a three-minute neuromuscular exam correctly, and knowledge about how to use the Institute for Clinical Improvement (ICSI) Guidelines in treating patients.

The training event consists of 3 “Trips” each of which represents a series of encounters between the Primary Care Provider and the 6 Guests, who represent the patients. Each trip consists of 4 elements – Patient History, 3-Minute Neuromuscular Exam, Assessment and Diagnosis, and Care Plan and Follow-up. Along the way, the “stories” of the individual Guests/Patients are developed through patient check-ins. Practice questions are presented along with the primary content. A “pack” is provided as a resource containing additional resources related to the treatment of patients with back pain. The event also includes an Initial Skill Check (pre-test) and a Final Skill Check (post-test).

The eLearning software is being release for pilot testing in selected clinics in May 2003 and, based on the data collected, will be revised as appropriate before a broader release later in the Summer.