Community Success Story: The PATH Project

McLaren Oakland Hospital

Summary
PATH (Personal Action Toward Health), also known as The Stanford Chronic Disease Self-Management Program, is designed to help people learn techniques and strategies for the day-to-day management of chronic or long-term health conditions. It is a six-week workshop conducted in 2 1/2 hour sessions each week. Workshops are offered in convenient, easily accessible community locations, and are offered for free, or at very low cost to participants.

McLaren Oakland launched PATH specifically for cancer survivors in January 2013. The program began with a goal to offer six workshops in the Pontiac area, recruit ten lay leaders, and recruit ten participants for each workshop, for a total of 60 participants.

Challenges
Before this program started there were no cancer survivor programs in the Pontiac community. Also, twice as many people are uninsured in Pontiac (19.9%) as in Oakland County (10%). Seeing a great need to reach the uninsured, McLaren Oakland built the capacity for its services to cancer survivors in Pontiac.

The benefit of PATH is that the lay leaders also have dealt with a chronic disease and McLaren recruited leaders that were cancer survivors and/or actively undergoing treatment for their cancer. Sadly, due to their illness’s progression and other life events three leaders had to leave the role. Losing three leaders in a short period of time was a challenge. In order to overcome this barrier, McLaren was able to reach out to the National Kidney Foundation and utilize one of their lay leaders who had already been trained.

“PATH Participants
“This workshop has helped me cope better with my problems and shortcomings.”

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Solutions

Lay Leaders (Mentors): Nine lay leaders were recruited and trained that were very invested in the success of the program. Seven were cancer survivors and two were student interns whom were assisting with the organization and implementation of the grant. The goal was for each leader to do two workshops during the year-long project. While only three of the leaders trained actually conducted workshops, four leaders had health issues which prevented them from participating, all three were excellent leaders and have expressed interested in continuing to lead workshops.

Workshop Location: Six workshops were completed during the project period. The workshops were held mainly at churches in Pontiac, however, one workshop was held at the McLaren Cancer Institute in Clarkston and one at a church in Orion. This allowed the participants to be in a familiar space that was also convenient.

Promotion: To help increase awareness of the new PATH classes, two volunteer interns from Oakland University and Baker College connected McLaren with local churches, assisted in setting up locations for workshops, and worked with the National Kidney Foundation to keep their website updated with information on all of our workshops. Advertisements were also placed in The Oakland Press and flyers were distributed within the community during health fairs and through direct mailings.

Preexisting partnerships: Our established partnership with Komen Detroit Race for the Cure and the Sister & Sister Free Mammogram Program were two key partnerships to promote and support the program.

Incentives: Each participant that completed a workshop received a $40 gas card and the lay leaders were compensated $200 for teaching a workshop.

Results

McLaren Oakland found the PATH project to be successful in the first year. Attending four of the six sessions was considered completing the workshop. In the first year 57 participants signed up to attend workshops and 47% completed the required sessions. Participants completed evaluations and 100% would recommend the workshop to their family and friends and 100% stated they would use the tools they learned. The top three tools reported were for physical activity, healthy eating, and action plans. The most telling factor of the success of the program was the fact that those who participated and benefited from the program have expressed a keen interest in leading workshops and wanting to attend more classes.

Sustainability

McLaren Oakland is very motivated by the PATH program’s great response in the community and is committed to expanding the program into other communities. The goal is to take lessons learned this year and make the PATH program an even bigger success moving forward. The PATH program will be expanded to Macomb and Lapeer Counties, as well as Pontiac and Clarkston in Oakland County. 20 new lay leaders who are cancer survivors will be recruited and trained and offer 12 workshops (three at each site). The new goal will be to recruit 120 participants (10 at each workshop) who are either cancer survivors, cancer patients currently in treatment and/or caregivers. A part time Project Manager/Patient Navigator will be brought on board to manage the workshops and will attend at least one session of each workshop to assist with overcoming any barriers they may have by providing suggestions on local resources.
Other Lessons Learned

The PATH Project was also implemented in four other communities across the State of Michigan. The following are lessons learned from their experience running the program.

**District Health Department #10**

PATH in the 10 counties served by the health department had very limited availability. Although there were a few PATH courses offered around the communities, they were primarily diabetes focused. There were no existing PATH workshops appropriate for cancer survivors. District Health Department #10 took on the challenge to increase PATH workshops specifically for cancer survivors, however, were not successful in increasing the program availability for cancer patients.

**Challenges**

Multiple barriers were identified to increasing the program’s reach in our community, including the following:

- The trend of PATH programs splitting into condition specific courses reduces opportunities for people with a variety of conditions. For example, classes that do exist are for diabetes or chronic pain only and are not appropriate for cancer survivors.
- Agencies providing PATH have staff spread so thin- they lack resources on developing and promoting it effectively.
- Many issues with PATH in our community have driven agencies away from offering it on a regular basis. Some of the factors identified were:
  - No insurance reimbursement for PATH
  - Expensive and time consuming to train and continue to update trainers/ leaders
  - Difficult to recruit and retain participants
  - Doctors resistance to referring – PATH is a patient driven process, not physician driven
  - Inability of PATH to change/alter name, there is frustration among providers that this creates a barrier to marketing
  - Transportation in rural areas is a barrier for participants

**Solutions**

While District Health Department #10 was not successful in opening PATH workshops for cancer patients, a very successful survivorship event was created. In an effort to support cancer survivors and offer resources the health department partnered with Memorial Medical Center in Ludington to sponsor a day long survivorship event. “The West Michigan Cancer Symposium; Surviving and Thriving” took place with approximately 80 people in attendance. A full day of speakers, lunch and vendor information booths were provided to participants. Speakers and vendors included oncologists, a dietitian, cancer center coordinator, physical therapist, aroma therapist, yoga instructor, acupuncture and a variety of others. This collaboration from providers in our community contributed to a full day of information, hope and support. The event committee hopes that the program will grow each year to increased local awareness of the importance of survivorship, the availability of local services, increased referrals and utilization of services. Being in a rural area, the community sometimes does not have direct access to the services often found in a larger metropolitan area. This important event helps local residents understand that there are resources for them right here in the community.
Health Department of Northwest Michigan

The four counties that Health Department of Northwest Michigan serves are Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet and Otsego counties. These counties were initially assessed for PATH program availability and leadership within the health district. No PATH classes were available in Antrim, Emmet, or Charlevoix Counties and no current certified leaders were available. There were previous leaders in Emmet and Charlevoix Counties, but they had lost their certification due to lack of participants and requirement for a minimum of two classes/year. The most active county was Otsego County which offered PATH, Chronic PATH and Diabetes PATH classes on a quarterly basis. Four certified leaders and three master trainers were involved in Otsego County in setting up PATH classes. The goal of this project was to increase enrollment in the PATH program from 7 to 25 participants in the four-county area, and increase PATH courses from one to three. No new PATH programs were able to be established in Antrim, Charlevoix, or Emmet counties, but there was an increase in participants from 7 to 14 participants in an Otsego County Chronic Pain class over the project year.

Challenges

The barriers in Antrim, Charlevoix, and Emmet counties were lack of leaders and participants for classes available. Two leaders are needed for a PATH class to be held. Eight to ten participants for each class must be signed up for a class to be held. Previous leaders in Charlevoix and Emmet had their certifications expire due to lack of classes and/or number of participants. Interviews were held with past leaders, each of them enjoyed the program and felt it was worthy, but all were frustrated by the lack of participants and the rule that two leaders must be at each class and expressed not having enough support from their sponsoring agencies. The previous leaders felt that it was nearly impossible to achieve that many participants due to the rural character of the counties served. Two of the Charlevoix County leaders were no longer associated with the facility (hospital) that originally promoted the PATH classes and did not feel they could represent the original facility in their current capacity. In Emmet County, the leader was employed by a hospital that promoted a different survivorship class, such as Cancer Survivorship and Wellness. This Emmet leader felt this program was just as good as the PATH program and less restrictive in number of participants and number of classes.

Solutions

The health department partnered with the Area Agency on Aging Project Coordinator to offer leadership classes. These classes were promoted through posting on websites and in flyers, hospitals and health facilities were also contacted regarding leader programs. There was no response to the leadership classes in any of the counties except Otsego.

Otsego County was able to hold a successful workshop because they have leaders that live in the area and who have networked with other agencies to get participants. The Area Agency on Aging, Michigan State University Extension, and the Health Department of Northwest Michigan partnered to train leaders and promote the program to various populations. The leaders were cross-trained in PATH, Chronic Pain PATH, and Diabetes PATH and alternated offering these classes to the public. Gaining physician buy-in to these classes was also a help, once physicians and their office staff were aware of the class content they were more likely to refer clients to the classes. Hospital Educators also were helpful in promoting the program. Outreach efforts utilizing social media was helpful in getting the classes advertised. A PATH brochure and Michigan Department of Community Health information sheets helped explain what PATH programs were about to health professionals and participants.
**Western Upper Peninsula Health Department**

PATH workshops have been offered across the Western Upper Peninsula (UP) communities for a number of years, with a focus on diabetes management. The Western UP Health Department has identified an opportunity to bring PATH workshops to the area to support cancer survivors. The lack of support means that many cancer survivors cope with chronic symptoms without support of peers or learning new ways to manage symptoms.

**Challenges**

As a new PATH program provider, the health department was met with challenges setting up workshops and marketing to the potential audience. The health department had to work on building capacity for its leaders and participant base.

**Solutions**

The first step the health department took to ensure that PATH is available to a wider audience, including cancer survivors, was to recruit two staff within the agency to attend and complete Stanford’s Chronic Disease Self-Management Program Master Training. Staff attended and completed training in California, and the health department team can now offer PATH workshops, and train new leaders, throughout the five counties of the Western UP (Baraga, Gogebic, Houghton, Keweenaw and Ontonagon). Through resources available from the PATH coordinator for the State of Michigan, the health department reached out to the Regional PATH coordinator for the Upper Peninsula. The health department will work with the Regional PATH coordinator for assistance with coordination of workshops, as well as promoting the planned workshops in our service area. The Western UP Health Department is positioned to take a leadership role in our communities to ensure PATH is available, working to reduce the chronic disease burden across the region.