

Project ECHO in Rhode Island

DARIA SZKWARKO, DO, MPH; LINDA CABRAL, MM;
GAIL PATRY, RN

BACKGROUND

Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) is an innovative, evidence-based telementoring model designed to build healthcare workers' capacity to address complex health conditions. The ECHO model uses a virtual "hub-and-spoke" framework to link experts with participants in order to enhance knowledge and skills, and ultimately improve patient outcomes. Developed in 2003 in New Mexico to help clinicians manage hepatitis C, the model has rapidly expanded globally to address other diseases and patient needs such as chronic pain, HIV, cervical cancer, substance use disorders, and palliative care.

As part of the ECHO model, ECHO courses are free and participants can receive continuing medical education credits. ECHO courses can be longitudinal or consist of a set number of sessions. Each session is 1–1.5 hours in duration consisting of a short (15–20 minute) lecture and a case presentation by a participant with a facilitated discussion (40–45 minutes).

In recent years, three ECHO hubs have launched in Rhode Island with various ECHO courses focused on addressing different patient populations. The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the ECHO programs across the state, and ensure that readers know how to find out about current and future courses.

THE WARREN ALPERT MEDICAL SCHOOL OF BROWN UNIVERSITY ECHO HUB

Created in 2019, this ECHO hub has hosted several courses led by faculty from the Department of Family Medicine geared towards primary care clinicians across the state. Completed courses have included a Latent Tuberculosis Infection ECHO (2020–2021), a Telemedicine for Educators ECHO (2021), a Hepatitis C ECHO (2022–2023) and a Perinatal Opioid Use Disorder ECHO (2023). Pre- and post-quantitative assessments of the Latent Tuberculosis Infection (LTBI) ECHO demonstrated a significant increase in self-reported confidence in various LTBI practice areas before and after the ECHO course. Information about future courses can be found on the hub's website: <https://sites.brown.edu/project-echo>



Regional LTBI ECHO Coordinator **Julia Teck, MD**, Global Health Faculty Development Fellow is shown with **Daria Szkwarko, DO, MPH**, Director of the Global Health Fellowship program in Family Medicine at Brown University at the 2023 MetaECHO conference held in New Mexico. [COURTESY OF DR. SZKWARKO]

HEALTHCENTRIC ADVISORS ECHO HUB

Created in 2019, this ECHO hub has hosted several courses such as the HOMESS ECHO series which focused on operating meaningful engagement for staff stability, a COVID-19 in Nursing Homes ECHO, a Behavioral Health education series, and PROJECT ROPE, which focused on reducing opioid use for pain management. In partnership with the Rhode Island Geriatric Education Center, six Project ECHO series took place in 2020 and 2021 focusing on COVID-19 safety protocols, vaccines, and the impact of COVID-19 among elderly patients, as well as behavioral health support. In Fall 2021 and Spring 2022, "Assessing and Caring for Persons with Cognitive Impairment" took place. Hundreds of health professionals from a variety of disciplines and settings, including primary care, long-term care, skilled nursing, and home care have attended. New ECHO Series will be announced via the website at www.healthcentricadvisors.org and will be distributed to the intended audience via constant contact.

CARE TRANSFORMATION COLLABORATIVE OF RHODE ISLAND (CTC-RI) ECHO HUB

Created in 2022, this ECHO hub is the newest in the state and focuses on supporting primary care transformation efforts. The first ECHO session was developed to support pediatric practices in the management of weight disorders among their pediatric

patients. The second ECHO was an Asthma Essential learning series for primary care, school nurses, and other interested community partners. Both ECHOs included a quality improvement component and offer stipends for achieving milestones. Evaluation results showed improved provider confidence, knowledge and comfort with managing these conditions. Future courses to be offered in 2023–2024 include a program improving care for children and adolescents with restrictive eating disorders by optimizing integrated behavioral health, and improving care for people with Alzheimer's Disease and their caregivers. Information about future courses can be found on the hub's website: <https://www.ctc-ri.org/06/13/2022/ctc-ri-completes-echo-training-and-lays-groundwork-asthma-and-pediatric-weight-management>

CONCLUSION

In Rhode Island, primary care team members have the opportunity to engage in ECHO courses focused on a breadth of topics and patient populations. These unique continuing medical education opportunities create innovative learning communities that can ultimately improve care across the state.

Authors

Daria Szkwarko, DO, MPH, Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, Family Medicine, Providence, RI.
Linda Cabral, MM, Care Transformation Collaborative of Rhode Island, Providence, RI.
Gail Patry, RN, Healthcentric Advisors, Providence, RI.

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Correspondence

Daria Szkwarko, DO
111 Brewster St.
Pawtucket, RI 02860
401-921-7981
szkwarkd@gmail.com

Founders share thoughts on 20 years of 'The ECHO Ripple Effect'

ALBUQUERQUE, NM – Over 20 years, Project ECHO's health programs, based at The University of New Mexico Health and Health Sciences ECHO Institute, have expanded from a single weekly session focused on

hepatitis C in New Mexico, to a global network of hundreds of specialized programs with learners in 195 countries.

In addition, it has recently partnered with the World Health Organization (WHO) to

establish the WHO Collaborating Center for Digital Learning in Health Emergencies.

"Building on the success of our partnership with the WHO in addressing the significant global health challenges posed by COVID-19 and preparing for future pandemics, we are proud to launch the first Collaborating Center for Digital Learning in Health Emergencies," said **SANJEEV ARORA, MD**, Project ECHO Founder and Director. "The ECHO Model is uniquely suited to help global organizations, governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) respond to emergencies, from pandemics, natural disasters to healthcare crises during violent conflicts, as we've seen in Ukraine and Sudan."

The three medical providers who started it all, Dr. Arora, **KARLA THORNTON, MD, MPH**, and **PAULINA DEMING, PharmD, RPH, PHC**, recently shared their thoughts on Project ECHO's past, present, and future.



Sanjeev Arora, MD



From left at table, **Drs. Paulina Deming, Karla Thornton, and Sanjeev Arora**, at the most recent 2023 Project ECHO conference in New Mexico. They have worked together for two decades to establish a global network of healthcare programs. [UNM HEALTH]

Dr. Arora: “We always wanted to serve rural populations, prisons, and people who couldn’t afford to see a specialist. Equity is the underlying principle of why we do ECHO. The ECHO Model has established a historic precedent for the possibilities of sharing knowledge. This served as an example for so many other complex issues, such as very complex diseases like HIV and TB, and for education and even in mitigating climate change – issues the world has been struggling with for decades. One of the least considered populations for hepatitis C treatment was incarcerated people. When we started, not a single patient in the prison had ever been treated for hepatitis C.”

Dr. Deming: “We can see that a common thread for professionals involved in any ECHO program – all of the thousands that now exist – is they want to step up and fulfill a need in their community. The ECHO Model really enables that. It created more of an impact on the population as a whole in New Mexico than I would have been able to do just seeing one patient at a time in my own clinic. Pharmacists, especially, aren’t usually treating hepatitis C but now we have a robust network, often in rural and underserved areas like Indian Country, who have learned how to do this. The ECHO team always knew what we wanted to do – but the success was still unprecedented.”

Dr. Thornton took the lead with working with incarcerated populations, leading to Peer Education Program ECHO. “We started screening and realized hepatitis C infection and re-infection rates in the prisons were around 50 percent, which was a revolving door to infecting the general population, too. Now we treat 500–600 patients a year in all 11 prisons in New Mexico. The Peer Education Program ECHO and related programs for Community Health Workers and Peer Social Workers are flagship New Mexico ECHO programs.

“I’m most proud of the community we helped to build and the longitudinal impact of that on equity: proving this can – and should – be done. We are all in this together.” ❖



Project ECHO with Director **Sanjeev Arora, MD**, center, launched the First World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Center for Digital Learning in Health Emergencies at the September MetaECHO conference. [UNM Health]