

## ANNOUNCING THE MULTI-COUNTY ECONSULT INITIATIVE

Inland Empire Health Plan is pleased to announce the new Multi-County eConsult Initiative (MCEI) for Riverside and San Bernadino Counties.

<b>VISION</b>	To provide solutions to the specialty care needs of safety-net populations thus ultimately increasing access to specialty care.
<b>GOAL</b>	To design and implement eConsult and eReferral coordination processes for all specialties throughout San Bernardino and Riverside counties. Implement a new technology platform and replace current referral workflows, processes, and systems to increase referral continuity and efficiency, and reduce referral back-flow.
<b>PURPOSE</b>	To support the workflow redesign of current referral processes and the implementation of a single eConsult and eReferral platform ("eConsult Platform") for use by MCEI Stakeholder contracted providers, following common standards and using a single sign-on process across both counties.
<b>HOW IT WORKS</b>	Inland Empire Health Plan (IEHP) is funding the 24-month program and will provide the eConsult technology for your clinic. Your clinic will be a recipient of the new technology and will be provided with a support team to manage the technology and process implementation. IEHP eConsult Team will provide subject matter expertise, consulting, and support for all necessary work efforts.

Each clinic will be able to interface directly with the IEHP Provider Portal through the eConsult platform.

The IEHP MCEI Team will be contacting you directly within the next few weeks to bring you this new and exciting program. We look forward to working with you on this program and making a difference in the lives and well-being of our patients!

### WHAT IS THE MULTI-COUNTY ECONSULT INITIATIVE (MCEI)?

MCEI is a partnership between Inland Empire Health Plan (IEHP), Arrowhead Regional Medical Center (ARMC) and Riverside University Health System (RUHS) that will improve access to care for the safety-net population in San Bernardino and Riverside counties. IEHP is sponsoring the initiative for the next 24 months and will design, implement and evaluate eConsult at more than 150 clinic sites. The ultimate goal is 100 percent participation from Providers throughout both counties.

- ♥ New workflows at each site will be developed in conjunction with technology implementation
- ♥ Primary care clinics and FQHCs will be the first to implement eConsult, with expansion to all clinics
- ♥ The first five clinics went live in March 2018

### WHAT IS ECONSULT?

eConsult is a care coordination process that allows primary care physicians (PCPs) to connect directly with specialists electronically when a patient may need a specialist referral. eConsult allows Providers to securely communicate, share health information and provide continuity of care for patients. Through a private and secure system, PCPs can ask a specialist a clinical question about their patient and receive advice electronically. This can be a simple question (e.g., regarding a drug dosage) or a more complex question following an initial assessment (e.g., providing images of the patient and requesting a virtual dermatology assessment). While some patients may need a face-to-face visit with a specialist, a majority of eConsults provide PCPs with the ability to manage patients in the primary care setting.

eConsult is ultimately a tool to facilitate Provider-to-Provider interactions in order to reduce patient visit wait times, unnecessary appointments and no-shows. It is not an expansion of health care services; it is another tool that allows Providers to improve their availability and the level of care they provide to patients.

### CAN I ACCESS ECONSULT THROUGH MY ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD (EHR)?

eConsult will be accessible through the IEHP Provider portal with single sign-on access.

### OVERALL DOCUMENTED IMPACT INCLUDES:

- 1 Access:** Patients arrive at specialty appointments with the appropriate work-up and shorter wait times.
- 2 Connect:** eConsult reduces unnecessary referrals to specialists and focuses treatment for patients on a priority basis. Specialists receive more efficient referrals, with clear clinical questions and related documentation.
- 3 Inform:** eConsult is a platform for specialists to exchange educational material with referring clinicians, providing "just-in-time" education. PCPs receive timely input and expertise from specialists, which then allows them to remain the main contact for their patients.
- 4 Value:** eConsult reduces no-show rates and increases the productivity of an appointment interaction by ensuring that diagnostic workups are complete. PCPs and specialists establish common expectations before and after a referral has been made. The overall quality of patient care improves.

## WHAT SPECIALISTS WILL BE INVOLVED?

Specialist commitment is at the heart of the MCEl program's success. RUHS, ARMC and IEHP are working collaboratively to ensure the consistency and breadth of the specialty reviewer network. Dedicated specialty reviewers who are vital components of the eConsult implementation have been identified, and additional specialists will be added as the program expands.

## WHAT ARE THE EXPECTED VOLUMES OF ECONSULTS?

eConsult will replace referral processes and systems for each specialty that goes live on eConsult. Initial eConsult volumes will be based on the number of referring sites that are live on the eConsult platform. Volumes will vary by specialty. Data from clinic sites, health systems and IEHP will be accessed and used to track eConsult volumes.

## WHAT IS THE MALPRACTICE LIABILITY WITH REGARDS TO ECONSULT?

All three California malpractice insurance companies cover eConsult and telehealth services as defined in legislation by the state of California. Each MCEl stakeholder (RUHS, ARMC, and IEHP) will ensure a consensus statement based on their respective liability arrangements and share them with Providers. Ultimately, Providers should discuss the scope of their malpractice coverage with their broker, insurer or organization.

## WHO WILL SET UP THE PROGRAM?

The eConsult platform was developed by Safety Net Connect. The MCEl Project Team has been retained to provide the eConsult implementation at each clinic site. The MCEl Project team will work on site with clinic staff and be readily accessible to all clinic physicians and staff throughout the implementation process. The team includes, but is not limited to: four senior physician engagement workgroup leads, seven workflow engineers, a clinical analyst, a project director, and a project manager. A concurrent evaluation of the implementation process and outcome assessment will be conducted.

## WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ECONSULT AND EREFERRAL?

With an eReferral, the patient goes to the specialist for a consultation after the PCP receives prior authorization. With eConsult, the patient's condition is discussed between the patient's PCP and the specialist, using eConsult's communications tools and processes. The patient has a face-to-face visit with the specialist when appropriate.

### WHAT IS eCONSULT?

eConsult is a care coordination process that allows primary care physicians (PCPs) to connect directly with specialists electronically when a patient may need a specialist referral. It is part of the Multi-County eConsult Initiative (MCEI), a collaboration among IEHP, Arrowhead Regional Medical Center (ARMC) and Riverside University Healthcare System (RUHS) to increase access to quality health care for low-income and vulnerable residents.

eConsult addresses the common barrier of difficult access to specialists for primary care physicians trying to deliver high-quality, coordinated care; especially when patients are low-income or uninsured.

The IEHP eConsult Program began implementation in March 2018. Initial specialties include cardiology, gastroenterology, hepatology, nephrology, ophthalmology, orthopedics, podiatry, rheumatology, urology and infectious disease, with more to be added as the MCEI initiative expands.

### BENEFITS OF eCONSULT

- ♥ Improved access to specialty care
- ♥ Improved patient care through creation of a patient-centered medical neighborhood
- ♥ Improved communication between PCPs and specialists
- ♥ Improved efficiency when requesting a consult
- ♥ Improved patient satisfaction due to decreased wait time for specialty appointment
- ♥ Expanded scope of primary care practice

### WHY eCONSULT?

The Inland Empire counties of Riverside and San Bernardino are geographically broad, with large areas that are medically underserved. IEHP Members have traditionally had a difficult time finding specialists who will accept Medi-Cal and other forms of government-sponsored health coverage. The goal of eConsult is to improve IEHP Members' access to necessary specialty care in a way that is also efficient and effective for Physicians.

When eConsult was successfully implemented by the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, it:

- ♥ Reduced specialty appointment times from nine months to less than one month
- ♥ Improved quality of care through increased PCP/specialist communication

### HOW DOES eCONSULT WORK?

- 1 eConsult begins when the PCP's office requests a specialty consult based on the patient's medical specialty need.  
  
The PCP provides the specialist with a brief history of the patient's present illness and pertinent clinical information, and poses specific clinical question(s). The PCP attaches any relevant clinical information such as labs and progress notes. Basic patient demographics and past clinical information are also available for specialist review.
- 2
- 3 PCP → Specialist  
HIPAA compliant email alert is sent to the specialist's private email.  
  
Specialists can log into the secure eConsult system from their email link to review and respond to the PCP using any Web-enabled device. The specialist can request more information, provide treatment recommendations, or recommend a face-to-face visit.
- 4
- 5 Specialist → PCP  
An email alert is sent to the PCP informing him/her that the eConsult has been answered. Back-and-forth communication can continue between PCP and specialist until the issue is resolved.
- 6 If the specialist recommends a face-to-face visit between the patient and specialist, this will be scheduled (outside of eConsult).

## WHAT IS eCONSULT?

eConsult is a care coordination process that allows an asynchronous dialogue between a primary care provider and specialty reviewer, using a HIPAA-compliant secure portal (it can also be used between any two providers, e.g., an emergency room provider and specialist). The dialogue between providers can be conducted from virtually any location (remotely), at any time, within a prescribed time-frame.

## WHAT IS A SPECIALIST REVIEWER?

A specialist reviewer (SR) is a specialty physician or surgeon who has agreed to engage in an asynchronous dialogue with a primary care provider to share clinical expertise, provide case-based learning and improve timely access to quality specialty care.

## WHAT TYPE OF ADVICE CAN I GIVE IN AN eCONSULT?

The specialty reviewer has four primary ways to proceed when engaging in an eConsult:

1. Provide clinical advice
2. Request additional information
3. Recommend a face-to-face visit
4. Recommend that another specialty be consulted

## IS eCONSULT COVERED UNDER MALPRACTICE INSURANCE?

Three major California malpractice insurance companies confirm that their policies cover eConsult and telehealth services as defined in legislation by the state of California. Each MCEI stakeholder (Riverside University Health System, Arrowhead Regional Medical Center and IEHP) has been asked to provide a consensus statement based on its respective liability arrangements, and to share this with providers. Ultimately, providers should discuss the scope of their malpractice coverage with their broker, insurer or organization. Standards of practice around eConsult have been adopted in many states.

## HOW MUCH TIME WILL AN eCONSULT TAKE TO COMPLETE?

Based on established eConsult networks and published results from studies, the average completion time for the majority of eConsults (across all specialties) is 3 to 5 minutes, with a minimum of 2 minutes and maximum of 10 minutes for more than 90 percent of eConsults. SRs who regularly report having to talk longer than 10 minutes are encouraged to consider a face-to-face (F2F) visit or obtain additional coaching and training from experienced SRs.

## **WILL I, THE SPECIALIST REVIEWER, SEE THE PATIENT MYSELF IF I RECOMMEND A F2F VISIT IN MY eCONSULT?**

Not likely. An SR is not necessarily the provider who will see a patient when a F2F visit is recommended. Patients will be assigned to a specialty clinic at which access is readily available, based on the geographic or network clusters established by policy for stakeholders.

## **WILL I BE COMPENSATED FOR DOING eCONSULTS?**

Specialists are compensated through their contracted networks (RUHS or ARMC). Funds are paid by IEHP to the networks with the rate, amount and timing of payments recommend by IEHP and based on the prior 12 months of referral data to the specialty group. During the implementation phase, IEHP will gather quality metrics evaluating the structure, process and outcomes of eConsults in order to establish a long-term incentive model based on quality and value.

## **WHAT TECHNICAL SUPPORT WILL I RECEIVE FOR PROVIDING eCONSULTS?**

IEHP has recruited and funded an experienced workflow, training and support team that includes physicians, workflow engineers and health IT staff who aide SRs with daily issues and guide them through the process of developing standard practices, clarifying questions and ideal dialogue templates.

## **HOW QUICKLY AM I EXPECTED TO RESPOND TO AND HOW OFTEN/ QUICKLY WILL PCPS REPLY?**

We anticipate, based on experience and literature review, that more than 80 percent of eConsults will be completed in two exchanges or less. By policy, we expect responses within 72 hours from SRs and encourage PCPs to reply in a timely manner.

## **IF I GO ON VACATION, WILL I STILL RECEIVE eCONSULTS?**

You should reassign your eConsults to another specialty reviewer before vacation, by emailing [help@econsultIE.net](mailto:help@econsultIE.net). The email should include the start/stop dates for coverage, the covering provider, and should be sent at least five business days prior to your time away. If you do not know who can cover you, please let our team know and we will make arrangements for the re-assignment.

## NEXT STEPS

**1 INTRODUCTION**

Meet the MCEI Project team

**2 ORIENTATION**

Learn about the Multi-County eConsult Initiative

**3 CURRENT STATE**

Assess the site to understand current workflow and issues, in preparation for Future State

**4 FUTURE STATE**

Address Current State issues and update the new workflow process

**5 IMPLEMENTATION**

Train with MCEI Team and process new workflow