

ARTHRITIS PARTNERS OVERCOME REGIONAL & PROGRAM BARRIERS

Technology and more effective communications merge scattered efforts

Public Health Problem

- The size of California – the third largest state by area and more than a 15-hour drive from end to end - presents a unique barrier to implementing statewide public health programs.
- California's four Arthritis Foundation chapters and the California Arthritis Partnership Program are widely separated making cohesive statewide efforts a challenge.

Program

- The California Arthritis Partnership Program and California Arthritis Foundation Chapters have mutual goals related to information dissemination, systems improvement, program delivery and data collection. Both entities recognized a need for more effective communication to facilitate reaching these goals and overcoming the barriers of distance and scattered resources.
- Communication methods instituted by the California Arthritis Partnership Program include: monthly conference calls, an annual program directors meeting (alternating southern and northern California locations), and Web-based systems to communicate and share program information, tools, resources, and data.
- Geographical Information Systems (GIS) technology provides Web-based, visual interpretation of existing program delivery sites, potential reach of systems partners, and population demographics. A tutorial including sample problems is provided to partners.
- The Diabetes Information Resource Center (DIRC), created by the California Diabetes Program in response to the needs of statewide stakeholders, is the Web portal used by the California Arthritis Partnership Program to help people exchange information and tools via a discussion forum and topic threads to support their work. DIRC houses research articles, fact sheets, meeting agendas, presentations, and program records specific to the arthritis program. A tutorial helps partners learn to use it.

Impact

- These enhanced communication efforts improve practice among the arthritis partners and reduce duplication – here's what the partners say:
 - Monthly conference calls are “*very helpful for strategic statewide planning to develop partnerships*” and an “*incredibly important opportunity for keeping partners informed of activities.*”
 - The annual program directors meeting is “*dynamic and productive*” and “*important for educating statewide program staff and bringing together as a team.*”
 - GIS is “*a very helpful tool to ... visually locate programs and resources at-a-glance.*”
 - DIRC is “*a good repository/communication tool*” and “*important information to promote the importance of physical activity to chronic disease management.*”

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