

MCDIN Fall Quality Improvement Symposia: Eliminating Health Disparities

Co-sponsored by
MCDIN and Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers
and the
New England Case Management Society
Friday, October 27, 2000, 10:00 am - 3:00 pm

Fee: \$50 includes lunch

For additional information please call: **Berkshire AHEC at 413-447-2417, or e-mail at berkahec@aol.com**
A call for presentations will be mailed out in June 2000.

Berkshire AHEC
Area Health Education Center
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Progress Notes

April 2000

MCDIN

*Massachusetts Chronic
Disease Improvement
Network*

Progress Notes

A Newsletter of the Massachusetts Chronic Disease Improvement Network (MCDIN)

Volume 4, No. 1

April 2000



Massachusetts Chronic Disease
Improvement Network

"sharing approaches...improving lives"



MCDIN Wants YOU

From the Editors

Busy professionals are among the first to succumb to information overload. The ease and speed of delivery of modern communications can leave you feeling dazed by the sheer quantity of data that flows your way on a daily basis. Dare to take some time off! It is likely that following a two-week vacation, your voice mail has reached its capacity and your e-mails number in the hundreds.

We hope to provide some respite and help you keep your sense of humor (Coping Strategy #1). There are useful tips tucked inside for managing print, Internet, and electronic and voice mail communications. There is even a quiz to help determine if you really are asphyxiated by and need to redirect your information management style.

We also are very pleased to formally launch our website - MCDIN.org. Some of you may have already visited the site but it has undergone many improvements based on feedback from testers. MCDIN.org is still an organic site, and only as good as its users. We need your help to build the searchable databases. Please add your name to the Rolodex and tell us about your quality improvement projects or resources by completing a "Models for Care" or "Tools and Resources" form. Both are accessible in their respective asthma or diabetes sections.

InfoGlut

Susan Poulin, Project Specialist, Berkshire Area Health Education Center

InfoGlut, Information Asphyxiation, and White Noise are just a few of the new-age terms used to describe *Information Overload*. Defined as information received at such a rapid rate that it can not be assimilated, an excess can lead to information saturation. When this occurs, less attention is paid to each message and thus less information is received. This onslaught of digital and pulp verbiage effects anyone who has a connection to the world wide web, electronic mail, voice mail, or a fax machine. Technology, with all good intention, was supposed to make the human organism more efficient. Concurrently, it has also managed to waste our time each week.

Psychologist, David Lewis, describes a new phenomenon - *Information Fatigue Syndrome*.

Symptoms include:

- Rise in absenteeism
- Lack of focus when at work
- Loss of confidence and decision making abilities
- Irritability and ill temper

In serious cases people can suffer from sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, sexual drive, and experience severe mental fatigue. Yikes! Is this where we are headed?

Ironically, I entered a state of information overload as I researched the topic. Like kudzu, information overload is spreading rapidly, but there are strategies that one can use to manage the excess more effectively.

Look Inside. ➔

Tips for Lightening the Load: Voice Mail

- **Check voice mail often.** Going hours without checking voice mail causes message bump, where the same person calls you over and over with the same message. Check your voice mail at least three times per day to avoid the problem.
- **Skip the outgoing message.** The next time you get someone's voice mail, try pressing your phone's star (*) or pound (#) key. One of them is likely to skip the remainder of the outgoing message and put you straight through to the beep so you can leave your message. Pressing the zero key takes you out of voice mail and lets you talk to a human being.
- **Avoid Phone Tag.** Leave a detailed message, not just your name and phone number. That way if your call is returned and you are unavailable, you can still get the answers you need.
- **Return calls late at night.** If you have to return a call, and don't want to engage in conversation, return the call late at night when you are sure to get voice mail. Leave a succinct message that does not require a response.
- **Change your outgoing message.** Your callers should not get the same outgoing message when you're on the phone as when you are on vacation. Change your message if you are to be out of the office for an extended period of time.

- **Have a short but comprehensive outgoing message.** Create an outgoing message that is quick and friendly. The perfect message greets the caller, identifies you and your company, asks the caller to leave a detailed message, gives the caller the option of contacting someone else right away, and closes courteously.
- **Let callers skip your outgoing message.** Find out which Touch Tone key skips the outgoing message in your office voice mail system, and tell your callers about it in your outgoing message. If you want first-time callers to hear the entire message, give them this information at the end of your message.

The Web

- **Hit it again.** If your browser gives you an error message when you type a URL, try it again immediately.
- **Choose one search tool and learn it well.** Stay with one search tool, you won't get confused.
- **Use near searches.** Settle for a search tool that does near searches. For instance, while restaurant AND tax will find any page with those words on it, restaurant NEAR tax will show pages where the words are no more than 10 words apart.
- **Bookmark distractions.** Don't follow any links that are irrelevant to the subject you are researching.

(Continued on page 3)

Progress Notes is the newsletter of MCDIN (Massachusetts Chronic Disease Improvement Network). MCDIN is funded by the Division of Medical Assistance and managed by the MassHealth Access Program in the Office of Community Program at UMass Medical School in cooperation with the Berkshire Area Health Education Center. For information about contributing an article or resource to *Progress Notes*, please call Susan Poulin or Gretchen Kinder at the numbers listed below.

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Calendar of Upcoming Seminars and Conferences

June-December 2000

■ Making Quality Improvement Work in Your Practice- Intermediate Concepts

Co-sponsored by MCDIN and the Office of Clinical Practice Evaluation and Management, Baystate Health Systems

Wednesday, June 7, 2000, 3:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Chestnut 1A & 1B, Chestnut Surgical Conference Center Baystate Medical Center Campus, Springfield, MA

Fee: \$10

Credit: 2.4 hrs Nurse, 2 hrs RT, Dietician, CPHQ

■ For additional information on MCDIN programs, please call: **Berkshire AHEC at 413-447-2417, fax at 413-499-0370, or e-mail at berkahec@aol.com**

■ Making Quality Improvement Work in Your Practice- Introductory Concepts

Co-sponsored by MCDIN and Southeastern Massachusetts Area Health Education Center (AHEC)

Thursday, June 15, 2000, 3:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Andover Country Club, North Andover, MA

Fee: \$10

Credit: 2.4 hrs Nurse, 2 hrs RT, Dietician, CPHQ

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Friday, October 27, 2000, 10:00 am - 3:00 pm

Fee: \$50 includes lunch

Credit: Physicians, Nurses, Case Managers, CPHQ's, and other relevant professionals

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■ Pediatric Asthma Update for Primary Care Providers

Sponsored by the Harvard Medical School Department of Continuing Education

Friday, June 16, 2000, 8:00 am - 3:30 pm

Westin Hotel Copley Place, Boston, MA

Fee: \$125 MD; \$95 Allied Health Professionals

Credit: 7 Cat. 1 Physicians; Nurses (applied)

Inquiries: 617 432-1525, Monday-Friday, 10 am - 4pm or e-mail: hms-cme@hms.harvard.edu

To view course information on-line:

www.med.harvard.edu/conted

■ Improving Care for People with Chronic Conditions

Institute for Healthcare Improvement's National Congress, Asthma and Diabetes.

Monday - Tuesday, June 19-20, 2000

Seattle, WA

For more information: Please call 617-754-4824 or visit their website at: www.ihl.org

■ Diabetes Education in Patient Management for Allied Health Professionals

Joslin Diabetes Center's Fall 2000 Program

Wednesday - Friday, October 11-13, 2000

Longwood Galleria, Boston, MA

Fee: \$450

Credit: 23 Nurses, Pharmacists; 1 CEU's Dietitians

For more information please call 617-264-2759 or visit their website at: www.alliedhealth@joslin.harvard.edu

■ Annual Convention of the Massachusetts Nurses Association

Wednesday - Friday, November 8-10, 2000

Seaport, Boston, MA

■ Eliminating Health Disparities

128th Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association

Sunday - Thursday, November 12-16, 2000

Hynes Convention Center, Boston, MA

For more information contact edward.shipley@apha.org or call 202-777-2478. An on-line Advance Registration Form will be available after June 1 at www.apha.org.

■ 12th Annual National Forum on Quality Improvement in Health Care

Institute for Healthcare Improvement

Tuesday - Friday, December 5-8, 2000

San Francisco, CA

For more information please call 617-784-7252 or visit www.ihl.org.

MCDIN Advisory Committee Tips for Managing Information Overload:

In my search for resources and research that could benefit my work, I find myself with an incredible amount of reading to do. I tend to let newsletters, e-mail, and web references pile up on my desk. Once every two weeks, I take this pile of information, along with a highlighter, pencil, scrap paper, post-it flags, and a "File Copy" stamp and go to a favorite coffee shop. I then read through the mail and mark useful information with information about how I need to follow-up. For example, I may highlight a phone number for a new publication, and write a note to the administrative support staff in my office to call to request a copy of the resource. I find that I often need only an hour and a good cup of decaf to go through my mail and put together piles of things that need follow-up.

Gretchen Kinder, MSW, MPH
MassHealth Access Program

Schedule a couple of times during the day to answer e-mails and phone calls – do them in one block of time. Spend some time to work on a high priority project every day. Waiting for a large block of time to devote to the project never happens. Schedule time with yourself to catch up on reading, literature reviews, etc.. Try to process the paper that lands on your desk once rather than moving it from one pile to another – read, file, do the action item.

Rita Sevier
Division of Medical Assistance

When I am completely overloaded, I find I need to focus on just one task. So, if I'm in the middle of a project, I will let my machine take calls so I can complete things without interruption. Then, I plan to go to yoga that evening!

Maura Lessard
Case Management Society of New England

I look at my calendar one week in advance and block off free time so I can complete tasks without interruptions. I also try to arrange for information to come through only e-mail. I have found that I am better at reading than listening to voice mail. Plus, if I can't get to it right away, I have a hard copy that I print out to "tickle" me to do something different.

Joan Hill
Joslin Diabetes Center

I'm trying to adopt a practice I learned from a co-worker. Try not to look at something (e-mail, memo, report) and put it aside to deal with later. Pick it up, read it, and take action at that moment (respond, make notes, etc.). I think this saves time and energy and a feeling of being overburdened with information in the long run.

Marlene Kane
Division of Medical Assistance

Before you leave work each day, take 5 minutes to straighten up your desk. File unneeded papers, make a list of tasks for tomorrow, throw something out (better yet recycle it), delete 10 old email messages from your file cabinet, clear an opening on your desk so there will be a place to put things when you come in.

Joanna Ezinga
Associate Director
Berkshire Area Health Education Center

It is really simple--turn it off!

Susan Poulin
Project Specialist
Berkshire Area Health Education Center

Coping (Continued from page 5)

Yet the solution is an old-fashioned one contends Emory Mulling, president of the Mulling Group in Atlanta. Mulling says, "People must recognize that they have to prioritize and window. Just because we have access to all of the information, it doesn't mean we can process all of it." He also argues that because we have advance search engines, smart filters and gigantic hard drives on which to store data, the clock speed of the single most important processor, the brain, isn't any faster. The old dictums still apply:

- When information comes in: Read it, take action, or discard it. Don't create huge piles of articles, faxes, and computer messages.

- Even the best filing system cannot hold everything. Whenever possible, screen, window, and summarize for you and your colleagues.

These strategies are well-suited for our information-saturated culture. Mulling warns that the "data glut" will exacerbate as technology quickens. "Just remember, you can't read it all."

Paper / Fax (Continued from page 2)

- **Throw it away.** When you pick up a piece of paper, insist that you have a good reason to keep it.

- **Attend to the fax machine regularly.** An unattended fax machine rapidly creates a log jam. Someone should check the fax machine regularly.

- **Avoid publishing fax numbers.** To cut down on junk faxes, do not list your fax number in a phone directory or newspaper unless you specify that your fax machine is for "to order by fax" or "fax order line."

- **Complain loudly.** Let the Better Business Bureau and your utility commissions know about anyone who sends junk faxes. The offender will stop.

- **Use a fax-modem.** Faxes in your computer are easier to sort, store, and delete than are pieces of paper. Set up your computer to receive those faxes.

- **Use faxback.** Set up an automatically responding faxback service. With the right software, most contemporary fax-modems can handle this function.

Sally Forth



E-Mail

- **Check e-mail headers.** Read the subject header first, then decide if you should open the e-mail. If your e-mail program displays the length of the message, check that as well. Don't waste time reading long and unnecessary e-mail messages.

- **Dispose of e-mail immediately.** If your e-mail program allows it, create folders for your various projects and drag them in to the appropriate folder. Otherwise, cut and paste important messages into a word processing file.

- **Treasure your e-mail address.** To limit unwanted mail, give your address only to special clients, colleagues, coworkers, and others who really need it.

- **Use just one mailbox.** If you have multiple e-mail addresses with different services, give them out to only coworkers and business correspondents. Find one e-mail front end that will handle them all such as Microsoft Office 97's Outlook, Eudora Pro, and Windows 95's bundled e-mail program called either Microsoft Exchange or Windows Messaging.

- **Write brief responses.** Correspondents who write to you frequently will adopt your style.

- **Stop repeated spam.** When you receive spam, check the bottom for an "autoresponder" address. Send an e-mail to the address with the word remove in the subject area, and you will probably be removed from the mailing list. If you're not, find out whether your service provider has a customer service department to deal with spammers.

- **Prevent needless responses.** Let your correspondents know when they don't need to respond.

Triage and Let It Go!

When paper arrives by the bagful, what's the triage? Paper is something that should have a last stop. If a piece of paper doesn't direct you to take action, or state that it must be saved, it should be recycled.

Go through your mail, including faxes, once a day. Challenge each piece of paper as to why you shouldn't throw it away. If the paper meets the challenge (and most pieces won't), act on it, place in a to-do stack, send it to someone, or file it.

Meanwhile, keep your own paper consumption down as much as possible. You can cut down on paper by producing less paper.

Just How Overloaded Are You?

Take a few minutes to see how you score with this information overload quiz.

- 1. How many different ways does your business card list to reach you?**
 - (a) One - 0 points
 - (b) Two - 1
 - (c) Three - 5
 - (d) We're using a smaller font - 10
- 2. When do you check messages?**
 - (a) Every hour - 0 points
 - (b) Twice a day - 3
 - (c) At the end of the day 0 - 4
 - (d) I've forgotten how - 10
- 3. How many e-mail messages do receive on an average day?**
 - (a) Fewer than 10 - 0 points
 - (b) 11 to 40 - 5
 - (c) Over 40 - 7
 - (d) There's no end to the list - 10
- 4. How many of your e-mail's are from people you don't know?**
 - (a) None - 0 points
 - (b) A modest amount - 5
 - (c) More than half - 7
 - (d) More than Bill Gates and Gretchen Kinder - 10
- 5. How old is the oldest unread message in your mail box?**
 - (a) Less than 6 hours - 0 points
 - (b) 6 to 24 hours - 3
 - (c) 25 to 48 hours - 5
 - (d) The time stamp has faded - 10
- 6. How much time do you spend on the Web each week?**
 - (a) 10 hours or less - 0 points
 - (b) 11 to 15 hours - 5
 - (c) 16 to 21 hours - 10
 - (d) I'm supposed to turn off the computer? - 20
- 7. Your useful-to-fun Web site ratio?**
 - (a) 3 to 1 - 0 points
 - (b) 2 to 1 - 5
 - (c) 1 to 1 - 10
 - (d) There are useful web sites? - 15

- 8. How many phone calls do you get a day?**
 - (a) 0 or fewer - 0 points
 - (b) 6 to 8 - 5
 - (c) 9 to 12 - 8
 - (d) Can I get back to you on that? - 10
- 9. The pile of papers in your in-box is:**
 - (a) About 1/2 inch thick - 0 points
 - (b) Used to prop table with broken leg - 5
 - (c) Referred to around the office as I have been "Kindered" - 7
 - (d) What in-box? - 15
- 10. How many meetings do you usually attend in a week?**
 - (a) 3 or less - 0 points
 - (b) 4 to 6 - 3
 - (c) 7 to 10 - 6
 - (d) I'll call a meeting about it - 10
- 11. How many of these meetings run over scheduled times?**
 - (a) None - 0 points
 - (b) Less than half - 3
 - (c) Most of them - 6
 - (d) Hard to say—the meetings run together - 10
- 12. Have you ever fallen asleep in an important meeting?**
 - (a) No - 0 points
 - (b) Once - 2
 - (c) It's a long story - 5
 - (d) I'm sorry, what did you say? - 10

SCORES:

0-10 points:

11-50 points:

51-80 points:

80-120 points:

121 or above:

Get a job!

Don't change a thing!

You're warm. Get more organized.

Slow down, take a vacation.

Get a life!

Zen and the Art of Prevention

Jim Ryan, Director, Massachusetts Prevention Center, Lawrence, MA

As a professional in the field of prevention, there is an expectation that I practice a healthy lifestyle. My first approach to practicing prevention started a number of years ago when I decided to cut out all those things that I considered "bad" such as alcohol, meat, caffeine, and chocolate. My friends thought I joined a religious cult. This approach made me feel healthier, but after a while I began to question whether it was truly prevention. I was also beginning to really miss chocolate.

I then began to explore the teachings of different Zen Masters. It was in Zen philosophy that I discovered the concept of "wellness." Wellness focuses on taking care of all aspects of your health including the emotional, social, and spiritual. This totally shifted my view of prevention. Zen was teaching me that health promoting behaviors are much more important than avoiding those behaviors that lead to illness. This made much more sense to me, and, more importantly, it allowed me to indulge in chocolate again.

My practice centers on the Zen concept of "mindfulness" a state simply described by the Buddhist Monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, as "being awake, alive in the present moment." It is a very simple concept that, in reality, is very, very difficult to practice. How often do we exist in the present moment? Much of the time we think about what we need to do and worrying about what we did not do. How often do we stop and look at a blue sky or enjoy the laughter of a child?

My journey towards the "present" has centered on practicing both yoga and mindfulness meditation. These two techniques have been used for thousands of years in the East to assist the individual in learning how to connect with your body, mind, and spirit.

It is called an art because to truly receive the benefit from Zen teachings takes practice. In the West, we are under the impression that we can read books, buy the video, or listen to the tape, and we will reap the benefits from such great teachings. Usually the only people to benefit are those selling the books, the videos, and the tapes. In order to benefit from yoga or mindfulness meditation, it must become a daily practice. And by daily I mean it becomes a part of who you are.

One would ask "Who has time for that?" The good news is that it takes very little time. The fifteen to twenty minutes spent each morning practicing yoga and the effort I put towards this practice has rewarded me with marked health

benefits. Most remarkably is the decrease in my stress level. There are days, when I experience stress, but, overall, I am much more relaxed. I manage pain better, sleeping has improved, and I am less ill. Most of all, my appreciation for the simple things in life has been renewed.

If you would like to learn more about how to practice Zen and the art of prevention, look into these organizations:

■Rowe Camp & Conference Center, 413-339-4954,

www.rowecenter.org

■Kripalu Center, 1-800-741-7353,

www.kripalu.org

■Insight Meditation Society, 978-355-4378,

www.dharma.org

Coping with Information Overload - Too Much of a Good Thing Can Hurt Your Job Performance

Jim Owen is a freelance journalist who has written extensively for newspapers and magazines for over a decade.

With the proliferation of the Internet, non-stop Cable TV news, electronic mail, voice mail, faxes, pagers with stock quotes, cellular phones, and the explosion of newspapers, books, and magazines, Americans are drowning in information. Data glut is a serious issue in the American workplace.

The average worker spends more than half of his/her day processing documents. Hours are spent reading and answering e-mails, not to mention voice mails and faxes. Initially, e-mail was a blessing, but now has become a curse to those whose in-boxes are deluged with "FYI" messages and other information that previously was too cumbersome to deliver in the old mediums.

According to David Shenk, author of *Data Smog: Surviving the Information Glut*, people claim to want more information, but people confuse information with knowledge. Shenk writes that information overload fuels stress and promotes faulty thinking. Data glut "reduces our attention span and makes us numb to anything that doesn't grab us by the throat."

Paul Saffo, a director with the Institute for the Future in Menlo Park, CA, told *Information Weekly* that it is not the information that causes the problem, but the gap between the ability to process the information and the tools needed to assimilate it into useful knowledge.

(Continued on page 6)