

## BONE HEALTH TELEECHO: A GLOBAL STRATEGY TO EXPAND CAPACITY TO DELIVER BEST PRACTICE SKELETAL CARE

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**Objective:** Bone Health TeleECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) was established at the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center (UNM HSC) through collaboration of the ECHO Institute and the Osteoporosis Foundation of New Mexico. It is the prototype for technology enabled collaborative learning to expand capacity to deliver best practice skeletal healthcare worldwide. This is a report of progress and challenges since the start of this program in 2015.

**Materials and methods:** Data for Bone Health TeleECHO are collected by staff at UNM HSC through registration forms, attendance records, and online surveys. Additional information for similar programs at other locations is provided by the program directors through direct communication and teleconferences conducted every 3 months.

**Results:** The proof-of-concept Bone Health TeleECHO program at UNM HSC was launched on October 5, 2015. Weekly (excluding holidays) videoconferences have been held since that time. A total of over 600 healthcare professionals have registered, with typical attendance of 40-60 individuals for each weekly session. An outcomes study showed improvement in self-confidence in 20 domains of osteoporosis care after regular participation. Other Bone Health TeleECHO programs are based at locations that include Grand Blanc, Michigan, USA; Washington, DC, USA; Chicago, Illinois, USA; Galway, Ireland; and Moscow, Russia. Rare Bone Disease TeleECHO, based in Gaithersburg, Maryland, USA, is focused on the management of rare inherited skeletal disorders. Each teleECHO program operates independently according to available resources, the skills of the faculty, and the needs of the participants, while remaining true to the ECHO model of learning.

**Discussion:** ECHO links participants located anywhere there is an electronic connection. Learning is focused on interactive case-based discussions that recapitulate familiar learning strategies of postgraduate medical training programs. Bone Health TeleECHO uses state-of-the-art communication technologies to connect participants to advance their level of knowledge, with the goal of making them better equipped to manage patients with bone diseases. It offers educational opportunities with minimal disruption to office routines and relieves professional isolation that commonly occurs in a wide range of practice settings. Challenges for initiating and maintaining these include funding, staffing, recruitment of participants, and bureaucratic barriers.

**Conclusions:** Through replication and innovation in many global locations, Bone Health TeleECHO leverages scarce resources and expands capacity to provide better bone health care for more patients closer to home, with greater convenience and lower cost than referral to a specialty center. Bone Health TeleECHO may be particularly effective for improving medical care in underserved communities where health care professionals who may be professionally isolated.

KEYWORDS: Bone; healthcare; Bone Health TeleECHO.