

Nebraska Panhandle Uses iPads During MIECHV Home Visits

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The Panhandle region of Nebraska is reaching over 50 families in three counties¹ with the Healthy Families America model funded through MIECHV. When the state was developing their plan in 2011, the University of Kansas floated the idea of using iPads in the field. Staff in the Panhandle jumped on the idea. Betsy Walton, Program Manager and Clinical Supervisor of the Panhandle Public Health Department, came from a community health center where iPads were regularly being used. According to Walton, "It's the way business is being done these days, especially with our clientele who are teens and twenty-somethings. They like to use technology and it's second nature to them. We could anticipate the benefits for our families and appreciate how it would make our work more effective and efficient."

An Interactive Tool that Benefits the Families and Home Visitors

Tablet technology is a benefit to the families and home visitors alike in this remote, rural area. With family records, assessment tools, and quality web sites accessible via the iPad, home visitors are able to engage and respond to family needs and concerns immediately. For example, home visitors are using iPads for:

- ***Engaging Families in the Home Visit Experience:*** "There is a WOW factor," said Walton. Young families think the tablets are cool and hip. They want to engage with the technology and will watch educational videos, click on links to get more information, and take a real interest in the messages being conveyed. "It is very different from leaving behind a pamphlet, or reading a passage from a manual," said Walton. The families seem more interested and eager to learn when the iPad is part of the home visit.
- ***Entering Data in Real-time:*** Rather than record data on paper and then enter it into a data base in the office, home visitors are able to record all necessary data when they are in the field working with the family. Many believe that the quality of data is improved as a result. This also means that time is not

¹ The three counties targeted for MIECHV implementation include: Scotts Bluff, Morrill, and Box Butte.

lost and notes are not accidentally left behind. With carefully encrypted programs, there is no fear of data loss or misuse.

- ***Conducting Assessments and Providing Immediate Follow-up:*** Using iPads, home visitors are able to conduct assessments to monitor for depression, screen for drug and alcohol use, and review progress toward developmental milestones. Because they record data directly into the system, for some of these assessments (e.g., Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale or “CES-D”), they can assess, score, and compare the results to those of previous assessments, thus identifying if there are improvements to celebrate or emerging concerns that need attention.
- ***Creating Teaching Opportunities on the Spot:*** Home visitors are able to share with families a host of web sites and informative videos that can address specific questions or issues that the family may be having. Because of economic and geographical challenges, many families do not have access to the internet or other nearby places where they can go for online information about pregnancy, childbirth and early child development. Home visitors have standard web sites that they share with families including: the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (for information on immunization); InJoy Birth and Parenting (for information on birth and post-partum); posts on YouTube from medical schools (for information on C-sections); the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Brazelton Touchpoints Center (for information on child development); and Love and Logic (for information on discipline).

According to Walton, “One day a home visitor was in the doctor’s office with a pregnant mom. The wait time to see the doctor was longer than expected. Conversation turned to a health topic of concern to the mom. The home visitor took out her iPad and did a quick search and together the mom and home visitor were able to read a web site and watch a video that provided answers to the mom’s questions. The home visitor was making effective use of the time and the technology to share information and engage in an ad hoc teaching opportunity.”

- ***Connecting Families to Other Services:*** Home visitors are able to guide families toward the types of services they might qualify for, and provide referrals to appropriate providers (e.g.,

housing, food). At present, they do not have the bandwidth on the iPad for home visitors to support families in completing on-line applications for DHHS services (AccessNebraska), but that may come as technology advances in the future.

Staff Training and Support for Effective Use of iPads

There has never been any resistance to, or lack of creativity for, the use of iPads during home visits. In the early days, a few staff were more tech savvy than the others so they organized an orientation and training session to help all staff come up to speed with the technology. "It took no time for all the staff to grab hold of the iPads with both hands and start using them," said Walton. Staff regularly share ideas for additional applications and web sites that they can use in the field while working with families. According to Walton, "The iPad has always been an important part of our tool set and we would NEVER dream of giving it up."

Other Forms of Technology

As in a growing number of home visiting programs, the NE Panhandle Health Families America staff use texting with their families. Texting is part of the culture of the new generation of parents. Home visitors use this to their advantage, texting appointment reminders, forwarding information requested, or just to check in and offer encouragement.

Concluding Thoughts

Walton encourages other MIECHV grantees to use tablets too. Not only are tablets helping staff with recordkeeping, but they also enable staff to respond to the immediate needs of the families on the spot. Further, the "WOW factor" means that families are excited about their home visit experience, they find value in the real-time availability of information, and they are accessing a rich and varied set of resources in partnership with their home visitor. It is a win-win all around.

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