

Promoting Weekly Reflection to Support Outreach Workers: VCU Health's Reflection Logs

IN BRIEF

This technical assistance tool highlights how Virginia Commonwealth University Health System (VCU Health) — the largest safety-net hospital in Richmond, Virginia — is using simple weekly voice recordings as a management tool to support outreach workers in its TakeCCARE program. The audio “Reflection Logs” provide a mechanism for front-line staff to regularly share their successes and challenges and, in doing so, address any stress they may encounter through their work. VCU Health is a participant in the *Transforming Complex Care* initiative, a national multi-site demonstration made possible through support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

In 2016, the Complex Care Clinic at Virginia Commonwealth University Health System (VCU Health) launched TakeCCARE (Complex Care Assisting and Reviewing Education), a pilot effort deploying outreach workers to expand access to services for patients with complex health and social needs. In building this community-based care management model, VCU Health sought to track patient interactions and minimize burnout for its medical outreach workers. VCU Health found an innovative solution in its *Reflection Logs* — brief voice recordings used to monitor outreach workers' weekly patient interactions, experiences, and needs.

Tracking Successes, Challenges, and Needed Supports

In what began as an effort to provide guidance and support to two newly hired outreach workers, Kim Lewis, manager of VCU Health's Complex Care Clinic, asked the outreach workers to record Reflection Logs at the end of every week. These five-to-eight minute recordings, created easily using the voice recorder application on workers' cellphones, include responses to a series of structured questions aimed at distilling the week's experiences into key takeaways.

After the recordings are made, the outreach workers send them to their work email and save them to the team's shared folder where the recordings are then accessed by their supervisor and data and analytics team. Lewis reviews the Reflection Logs weekly, and notes any relevant issues such as challenging patient encounters, frustration, or anxiety. The recordings are also reviewed by VCU Health's data analyst, who collects patient demographics, encounters, and follow-up activities.

The Reflection Log questions have evolved over time. As noted, Lewis originally focused on understanding how the outreach workers were progressing in terms of their patient engagement and management skills, whether or not they were

REFLECTION LOG QUESTIONS

1. What would you consider a particular success this week?
2. Were there any particular challenges or goals that could not be met this week?
3. Was there a particular patient situation this week that required more of your time than you expected? If so, what was it and what was the outcome?
4. Did anything happen this this week that made you feel unprepared or in need of additional support or resources?
5. Did anything happen this week that left you feeling especially proud or enthusiastic about your work?
6. Did anything happen this week that made you feel especially stressed or frustrated with your work?

acclimating to the position, and if there were specific resources or trainings they needed. More recently, VCU Health adapted the questions to focus more on the outreach workers' successes, challenges, feelings, and need for additional mentoring or peer supports. In this way, the weekly "casual" voice recording check-ins also serve as a helpful barometer for staff wellness.

An Invaluable Resource for Front-Line Staff & Managers

VCU Health's outreach workers note that taking time to reflect on the past week helps them mentally process the week's events and decompress outside of work. This is a valuable resource for both front-line staff, who are often at risk for experiencing [increased rates of burnout and compassion fatigue](#), and for managers who are seeking ways to support their staff. In listening to the recordings, Lewis pays particular attention to the outreach workers' tone, frustrations, and worries, and uses that information to work through problems and potential solutions with the outreach workers during their regularly scheduled one-on-one meetings.

The Reflection Logs also help the care team identify patient care trends as well as important lessons for their work with future patients. The data and analytics team at VCU Health is currently determining how to incorporate this information into evaluations of the program's overall success. They also recognize the value of these audio logs as powerful sources of patient stories that can be leveraged to highlight the value of their program.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR HEALTH CARE STRATEGIES

The Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS) is a nonprofit policy center dedicated to improving the health of low-income Americans. It works with state and federal agencies, health plans, providers, and community-based organizations to develop innovative programs that better serve people with complex and high-cost health care needs. For more information, visit www.chcs.org.

ABOUT TRANSFORMING COMPLEX CARE

VCU Health is part of [Transforming Complex Care](#), a multi-site demonstration aimed at refining and spreading effective care models that address the complex medical and social needs of high-need, high-cost patients. This national initiative is made possible with support from the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#) and led by CHCS. For more information, visit www.chcs.org/transforming-complex-care.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Virginia Commonwealth University Health System: Beyond the Walls and Into Communities](#) - This profile examines VCU Health's TakeCCARE program, which uses "hotspotting" and "coldspotting" techniques to identify areas for targeted clinical outreach efforts.
- [Integrating Community Health Workers into Complex Care Teams: Key Considerations](#) - This technical assistance brief examines effective strategies for including community health workers in complex care teams.