



Grant Helps OSF Tackle Breast Cancer Screening & Treatment Disparities

For Immediate Release

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(August 31, 2020| PEORIA, Illinois)-OSF HealthCare is leveraging what it has learned during the COVID-19 pandemic to improve breast cancer screening among minority and low-income patients. The Health Equity Action Lab (HEAL) and Saint Gabriel Digital Health (SGDH) at the Jump Trading Simulation & Education Center will train digitally enabled community health workers to engage with patients in new ways.

They'll use digital tools including text messaging, videos, and two-way messaging to help educate and empower patients to engage more in their own health. In turn, that should help improve mammogram rates and lower breast cancer mortality.

Dr. Sarah Stewart deRamirez, Vice President-Chief Medical Officer for OSF Innovation says efforts will be funded by a \$75,000, one-year grant from the Illinois Health and Hospital Association and Blue Cross-Blue Shield Insurance.

"We decided we wanted to take on the disparities we see between rural and urban, between race and ethnicity amongst our patients and really try to reduce those disparities and bring up the level of both screening mammograms and ultimately life expectancy around individuals diagnosed with breast cancer."-Dr. Sarah Stewart deRamirez

Of the households that OSF HealthCare (OSF) serves, nearly half are low-income and almost a quarter are below the poverty line. Dr. Stewart deRamirez, who is also an Emergency Medicine physician, says nationwide 40% of the population gets a yearly mammogram but for low-income women over 39, it's closer to 20%.

According to Dr. Stewart deRamirez, "So depending on how much money you make and the insurance you get, that ultimately determines the rate at which people are able to access mammograms as well as access treatment and ultimately survive or die from breast cancer."

The main goal of the grant is to pilot a hybrid digital health worker (remote) and community health worker (in-person) model to see the impact on improving breast cancer screening for Peoria and 5 surrounding rural counties (Fulton, Henry, Knox, Tazewell and Warren). Stewart deRamirez says there is little understanding about the impact of using communication and education tools patients can access on a smartphone, pad or computer. The results of the research, in collaboration with the Harvard School of Public Health, could also provide insights about prevention approaches for other types of cancer and chronic diseases.

Abby Lotz, Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer for OSF Saint Gabriel Digital Health agrees it's important to collect evidence about what works to improve mammogram rates and early treatment for breast cancer.

"Do people want to stand and talk to someone at a health fair? Do they want to connect with their digital health worker in their community one-on-one? Do they want to connect passively through the health applications or messaging functions and we'll make sure we're using all of those approaches to meet them where they are."

OSF Saint Gabriel Digital Health deployed pandemic health workers to digitally support COVID care for individuals at home. Leaders were pleasantly surprised about people's willingness to use smartphones or tablets to stay connected with health care providers.

“I think that we don’t give each generation enough credit. I think technology is so widely adopted but we need to support that. We need to continually upscale our communities to help them with that adoption and we want to be the trusted partner to help them do that,” according to Lotz.

The grant will also support efforts to screen all at risk patients within the OSF HealthCare system for social determinants of health such as housing and food insecurity or transportation challenges that contribute to lack of access and care. Those who screen positive will be connected to community social service agencies that can provide support and reduce those barriers.

Dr. Stewart deRamirez believes technology can be a great equalizer in providing health equity but key to making an impact is understanding more about the extent people want to connect digitally and the kind of support needed to allow them to do that easily.

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OSF HealthCare is an integrated health system owned and operated by [The Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis](#), Peoria, Illinois. OSF HealthCare employs more than 23,600 Mission Partners in 147 locations, including 14 hospitals – 10 acute care, four critical access – with 2,097 licensed beds, and 2 colleges of nursing throughout Illinois and Michigan. The OSF HealthCare physician network employs more than 1,500 primary care, specialists and advanced practice providers, who are part of the [OSF Medical Group](#). OSF HealthCare, through [OSF Home Care Services](#), operates an extensive network of home health and hospice services. It also owns Pointcore Inc., comprised of health care-related businesses; [OSF HealthCare Foundation](#), the philanthropic arm for the organization; and [OSF Ventures](#), which provides investment capital for promising health care innovation startups.

Jump Simulation, a part of [OSF Innovation](#), is a collaboration between University of Illinois College of Medicine at Peoria and OSF HealthCare. The Jump center replicates a variety of patient care settings to ensure novice and seasoned clinicians can practice handling medical situations in a life-like environment. Boasting six floors and 168,000 square feet, the center is one of the largest of its kind and provides space for conferences, anatomic training, virtual reality and innovation. For more information, visit www.jumpsimulation.org.

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