

## EDUCATION ON-LINE: A COMMUNITY PRECEPTOR COMPUTER NETWORK

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### ABSTRACT

As medical education moves to ambulatory and community settings, communication among faculty becomes increasingly important. The Office of Generalist Education (OGE) of the Dartmouth Medical School has designed a Preceptor Computer Network to: 1) improve communications of curriculum to rural teaching sites, 2) enhance quality of community based teaching experiences, 3) support community based preceptors in their teaching efforts, and 4) help community preceptors engage more closely with academic medical centers. Creation of this network has required collaboration amongst several departments of Dartmouth College and the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center (DHMC) to offer hardware, software, network systems, and computer and network support.

The Preceptor Network provides community physicians with: 1) help in selecting and purchasing hardware; 2) a convenient Local Area Network e-mail system; 3) access to traditional library related resources (card file, journals, text, MEDLINE); 4) Netscape, the WWW and the OGE Home Page (oriented specifically to the preceptors and their students); and 5) a Clinical Information System which gives referring physicians access to their patients' clinical information at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center.

We measured the growth of this network by course director use, access and use of e-mail and clinical records, and community preceptor feedback.

After 18 months, over 180 teaching physicians are connected to the network. We have defined and distributed a standardized set of software; provided access to a standard hardware package; defined reasonable 'customer support' pathways; trained doctors and their staff; and provided a consulting resource specifically for this population. The use of the network has grown rapidly. Course directors distribute curriculum to community-based preceptors regularly and rely on the network for student and course evaluation. Students are required to use the network to access medical literature in the community setting. Preceptor e-mail communication and access to computerized patient clinical information has risen substantially.

The Network has provided important benefits to the learners, course directors, and community preceptors at Dartmouth. This system, because of its ease of implementation and use, will form the foundation for the introduction of additional tools to enhance and support community based teaching.

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