



ALASKA MEDICAID
NURSE TRIAGE LINE

Stakeholders

Chad Jensen – LaTouche Pediatrics, LLC
Kimberley Bricker, RN - PeaceHealth
Greg Fahl, MD – LaTouche Pediatrics, LLC
Grace Stout - The Children’s Clinic
Georgiana Page – Healtheconnect
Lye-Ching Wong, MD – Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation

Introduction

Alaska, a vast and geographically challenging state, faces unique healthcare access and delivery issues, particularly in pediatric care. To address these challenges, it is crucial to explore innovative approaches that improve healthcare delivery, reduce healthcare costs, and enhance patient outcomes. There is a compelling argument for the allocation of funds by Alaska Medicaid to establish a Pediatric Nurse Triage Line. This service will aim to reduce emergency room visits, provide better patient care, increase continuity of care, and facilitate better follow-up for pediatric patients. The implementation of such a service will not only be beneficial for patients and their families but will also lead to more efficient use of healthcare resources and cost savings.

Reducing Emergency Room Visits

The implementation of a Pediatric Nurse Triage Line in Alaska has the potential to significantly reduce emergency room visits. A study in 2022 reported “23.8% to 80.5% reductions in ED/UC rates for Medicaid-enrolled children” (Poole et al., 2022). A significant portion of emergency room visits in the United States is non-emergent and could be managed in less acute settings. In a state like Alaska, where access to healthcare services may be limited in remote regions, many parents and caregivers may choose the emergency room as the default option for seeking advice or care for their children due to the lack of alternative options. A Pediatric Nurse Triage Line staffed by experienced pediatric nurses can guide parents and caregivers in assessing the severity of their child's condition. This will lead to better-informed decisions, reduce unnecessary emergency room visits, and alleviate the strain on emergency departments (Howell et al., 2016).

Providing Better Patient Care

Alaska Medicaid's investment in a Pediatric Nurse Triage Line will enhance the quality of patient care. One of the primary advantages of such a service is the provision of immediate access to trained pediatric nurses. These nurses can offer expert assessments and provide guidance on first-aid, symptom management, and when to seek immediate care. This not only empowers parents and caregivers but also ensures that children receive appropriate care promptly. Research has shown that access to medical advice over the phone or through a nurse triage line can lead to improved patient outcomes and satisfaction.

Increasing Continuity of Care

Continuity of care is a critical component of effective healthcare, particularly for pediatric patients. A Pediatric Nurse Triage Line can play a vital role in promoting continuity of care by ensuring that the healthcare needs of pediatric patients are met consistently. The triage nurses can help bridge the gap between hospital visits by providing advice and guidance during and after acute situations. This facilitates a seamless transition from initial assessment to follow-up care, improving the child's overall health outcomes.

Better Follow-Up

One of the significant benefits of a Pediatric Nurse Triage Line is its capacity to provide follow-up and monitoring services by the primary care provider (PCP). The Nurse Triage Line can notify the PCP for follow up with parents or caregivers to ensure that children are progressing well, adhering to treatment plans, and addressing any further concerns. This proactive approach can prevent complications, improve adherence to care plans, and reduce the long-term healthcare costs associated with untreated or poorly managed conditions. Moreover, follow-up ensures that children receive timely post-emergency care when necessary or an option to be seen in the office. This follow-up care is essential for a full recovery and well-being.

Cost-Effective Care

The implementation of a Pediatric Nurse Triage Line can result in significant cost savings for Alaska Medicaid. By preventing unnecessary emergency room visits, enhancing patient care, promoting continuity of care, and facilitating better follow-up, this service can lead to a more cost-effective and sustainable healthcare system. The financial benefits of reducing the strain on emergency departments and preventing costly hospital admissions make this initiative a sound investment. (Howell et al., 2016, Bogdan et al., 2004)

Conclusion

In conclusion, the establishment of a Pediatric Nurse Triage Line represents a promising opportunity for Alaska Medicaid to improve pediatric healthcare in the state. It is a cost-effective and patient-centered approach that aligns with the goals of improving access to care, reducing unnecessary emergency room visits, enhancing patient care, increasing continuity of care, and ensuring better follow-up. By funding this initiative, Alaska Medicaid can not only improve the health and well-being of pediatric patients but also achieve significant cost savings, making it a win-win solution for the healthcare system and the people of Alaska.

Workflow

- Nurse Triage IT Capabilities and Requirements
 - Medicaid will upload the Medicaid patient empanelment and their PCP to the Health Information Exchange (HIE) and to the Nurse Triage Line provider. This will ensure that only qualified patients can use the service and that the PCP is notified of the calls for follow-up.
 - The triage service integrates with the state HIE (Healthconnect) to pull the patient's PCP from the practice and notify the PCP through this interface. This will ensure that if the information in the previous step is missing or doesn't match, the appropriate providers are notified.
 - Those practices not connected to Healthconnect can upload a CSV file with patient empanelment through an SFTP.
 - A web dashboard will be available for practices to retrieve Nurse Triage notes for their identified patient empanelment.
 - TriageLogic is a Nurse Triage company that most pediatric offices in Anchorage use. We encourage using them as the Medicaid Nurse Triage Line, but whoever the state decides to use will need similar capabilities.
 - I have verified with TriageLogic that they could do these items.
- Medicaid will advertise their Nurse Triage Line number and print it on the patient's Medicaid card. This service would be available 24/7 for all Medicaid patients.
 - Medicaid should train and encourage participants on using this service.
- Medicaid patients who are seeking medical advice from their PCP Nurse Triage line.
 - If the PCP has a phone tree option for Nurse Triage, they should implement an option for Medicaid patients that will transfer to Medicaid's Nurse Triage.
 - The calls need not be redirected if the practice uses the same triage service. Based on the Medicaid patient empanelment upload, the charges will be separated from the practice charges on the triage service end.
 - Medicaid will not reimburse practices for Nurse Triage Services but will offer the service.
- Partner with the Emergency Departments to see if a sign can be hung in the waiting rooms, with a QR code to quickly call a Medicaid Nurse Triage if the patient chooses.
 - A Medicaid patient will never be turned away from the Emergency Room, but the option to call Nurse Triage while they wait could be offered.
 - The offering of this will be determined if the patient is presenting with a non-urgent condition.
- There should be an expectation that all PCPs are following up on all Nurse Triage notes.
 - If this is out of a practice's capability or a patient does not have a PCP identified, other practices should have the option to follow-up on these patients.
 - A way to track this so multiple practices are not following up on the same patient without a PCP.

- There should be an expectation that all PCPs are following up on Emergency Room visits.
 - Practices should use the Emergency Room Information Exchange (EDIE\PreManage). This system will notify the practice of their patients that visited the ED and did not identify their PCP or the PCP was not updated in the ED's EHR.
 - Healtheconnect has similar capabilities but is missing some EDs.
 - Ideally, EDIE and Healtheconnect interface soon.

References

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