From the Field: Academic Detailing to Increase Screening for Infectious Diseases

by Connie DiCocco, M.Ed., CEO, Alosa Foundation

Alosa Foundation is a national nonprofit leader in developing and implementing AD interventions. Founded in 2004, Alosa’s AD programs have traditionally focused primarily on topics related to prescribing decisions. However, in 2012, Alosa formed a partnership with the HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, STD & TB Administration (HAHSTA), of the District of Columbia Department of Health (DoH) to perform academic detailing to improve screening for HIV. The story of this intervention highlights an area of growing opportunity for AD.

Washington DC’s 2.4% prevalence rate for HIV meets WHO criteria for a severe and generalized epidemic. As such, HAHSTA identified routine HIV screening for patients seen in private medical offices as a means to reduce the number of undiagnosed patients with HIV, enhance access to infectious disease providers, and increase co-management of patients between primary care and specialists. Beginning in 2006, HAHSTA partnered with large primary care clinics and hospitals to adopt routine HIV testing. Then, in 2012 HAHSTA expanded routine HIV screening to practice settings throughout the city, using AD as the key tool to communicate with a wide range of practices and clinicians.

For the initial phase of the program Alosa created, in partnership with HAHSTA, clinically relevant HIV/AIDS educational documents that included a comprehensive literature review, provider education materials, and patient educational aids. HAHSTA supplied materials explaining some of their service offerings in the district. Alosa identified, trained and deployed Clinical Educators (CEs) throughout the District who met directly with clinical and office personnel to engage in dialog about the need for routine HIV screening and to assist with the practical aspects of implementing screening. Alosa also provided Continuing Medical Education (CME) credit for the healthcare providers, helping them to meet a local mandate for CME on HIV/AIDS.

Between December 2012 and February 2014, Alosa completed 1,650 visits on HIV screening. This included visits with 565 individual physicians, as well as numerous other healthcare and office staff. The intervention typically required two visits. The initial one focused on reviewing the current HIV screening practices, conveying the DoH guidelines and encouraging implementation of routine screening. A second follow-up visit was made to gauge adoption and success. At that time the CEs assessed whether the practices had accepted the screening guidelines and would start routine HIV testing of their patients. Of the 357 providers that completed the program, 69% fully implemented the guidelines and another 23.5% partially implemented, for a total of 92.5%. Across the board, both clinical and other office personnel expressed their appreciation for the information provided. Many thought the office visit concept was ideal, with over 150 visited practitioners taking direct advantage of the free CME credits offered.

Viral hepatitis represents another priority area for HAHSTA. In August of 2014, Alosa redeployed its clinical educator into the field to promote HCV and HBV screening recommendations. Materials include both HAHSTA and Alosa clinical materials and patient information. Physicians and practice-related staff will be visited again, continuing the goal to improve the quality of health care and health outcomes for patients; a top priority for HAHSTA and the core mission of Alosa.

Connie DiCocco, M.Ed. is the Chief Executive Officer at the Alosa Foundation. She provides senior leadership and strategic direction to the Foundation, including oversight of all administrative activities, financial systems and organizational initiatives.