

2020 NPCR OKLAHOMA CENTRAL CANCER REGISTRY SUCCESS STORY

STORY TOPIC: Challenges and successes of implementing overnight teleworking

STORY CATEGORY: Registry Operations

STORY TITLE: The Four C's of 2020: COVID-19, Confusion, Chaos, Coming Together

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SUMMARY

It is late winter 2019 and stories about COVID-19 are beginning to appear more regularly on the evening news. Over lunches, the staff of the Oklahoma Central Cancer Registry (OCCR) begin discussing the virus and its possible impacts. The second week of March arrives and suddenly, without warning, life changes.

CHALLENGE

Across the nation, employers are starting to send employees home hoping to curb the spread of the virus and to keep employees and families safe, while continuing the operations of everyday business with as little disruption as possible. In our roles at the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH), we had not teleworked before and, while a written policy did exist at the agency, the daily processes and protocols for teleworking had not been implemented.

The challenges of quickly implementing various aspects of multiple employees' jobs became very evident and fell into the hands of senior management and directors. Processes we took for granted when working in an office environment now had to be reevaluated while sending employees home as quickly as possible.

For example, making sure laptops were compatible with monitors, wires and cords were correct, personal internet connections were secure and fast, confidential information was remained protected, forwarding phone calls and messages from an office phone number to a home or cell phone number, holding virtual meetings for everything from one-on-ones to department-wide meetings.

Everything from the most mundane daily tasks to the larger workings of an entire health agency had to be re-examined. It was a new way of working.

SOLUTION

Luckily, the OSDH was completely supportive of sending employees home to telework and quickly put a plan into place. OCCR staff were sent home on a Monday for a test run of sorts. We returned to the office Wednesday and voiced our concerns on various issues. Supervisors met and began to write up protocols and processes to implore the agency leadership to allow teleworking to keep everyone safe while maintaining productivity and confidentiality. Thursday morning, the various documents were ready for review and employees' signatures to begin teleworking. By Thursday afternoon, employees started to pack up their laptops and grab

resources they might need for working from home for a few weeks. What we didn't realize at the time was we were saying goodbye: to one another, to face-to-face interactions, and to the way of life as we knew it. Working in an office environment with co-workers we had come to rely on and being steps away from one another for quick questions, coffee breaks, or unplanned meetings was no longer part of our routine.

Supervisors kept everyone informed by email and utilizing Microsoft TEAMS quickly became the norm. The OCCR is within the Center for Health Statistics (CHS) at OSDH. Two separate TEAMS groups were set up, one for the OCCR and one for all employees of CHS. Each morning, everyone checks in on the main channel and we keep co-workers updated on our status for the day, whether it's going to lunch, or an appointment, or checking out. Previously this was done on a physical board in the office – and now it has become a virtual check in and check out space.

Supervisors, managers, the data manager, consultants, and other employees are readily available and just a TEAMS message away. Meeting requests are also sent through TEAMS and each employee can respond as available, just as if one knocked on another's cubicle wall for a quick check-in.

RESULTS

In the middle of March of this year, just before the COVID-19 pandemic really took hold across the United States, about 31% of workers in the United States said they had worked from home. Just a few weeks later in early April, that number rose to 62% (Forbes, Oct. 14, 2020, Coronavirus Silver Lining: A Better Work-Life Balance?).

Of course, there were some hiccups. This was a new way of working for many individuals that no one was prepared to implement overnight, and tactics were quickly set in place. It seems that most of the rough patches have worked themselves out and things are running smoothly. We are better able to adapt to significant changes in work processes and environment because of what we faced earlier this year.

Things like setting up a home office and having the right cords and monitors was a minor issue and easily correctable. While many of us thought we might be back in just a few short weeks, those weeks turned to months and we have been forced to settle into our home offices for the foreseeable future.

TEAMS meetings have become the norm. Although screens sometimes freeze or the internet kicks us out, these are all minor issues that can be corrected. Being able to share our computer screen with one co-worker or a whole group helps with walking through a process, presenting new material or information, and training new employees. All activities we would have previously done in person have found a new process through screenshares and video calls.

OSDH has always used email and the internet to communicate with employees. For employees used to sitting within shouting distance of one another, learning to write clear, concise, and complete emails was a new necessity. And if all else fails, picking up the phone works as well as it always had and is sometimes still the best option.

Since we are working with protected health information (PHI), a secure email server was needed to communicate with facilities sending information to the OCCR. Our data manager was very helpful in understanding the agency's processes that were already in place and walking the OCCR team through the process to continue to protect PHI.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Currently, we have been 100% teleworking since March 2020. No one thought we would be home this long, and it looks like this might be the new way of working for the OCCR and for OSDH as a whole. Things are running smoothly. Glitches are quickly taken care of and supervisors, directors, and the commissioner are still supportive of these new processes, where those who need a safe environment can work from home to protect their health.

REGISTRY CONTACT INFORMATION

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[https://www.ok.gov/health/Health_Promotion/Oklahoma_Central_Cancer_Registry_\(OCCR\)/](https://www.ok.gov/health/Health_Promotion/Oklahoma_Central_Cancer_Registry_(OCCR)/)

Source

Spiggle, Tom. (October 2020). Coronavirus Silver Lining: A Better Work-Life Balance?
Forbes.com. Accessed 20 October 2020.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/tomspiggle/2020/10/14/coronavirus-silver-lining-a-better-work-life-balance/?sh=7e6091eb1fc2>