Biomedical and Health Informatics Lecture Series

Tuesday, April 6, 2010
12:00 - 12:50 p.m., Room RR-134

Kenton T. Unruh, PhD

Program Administrator, Washington State Project ECHO
(Extension for Community Health Outreach)
Program Operations Specialist, Project ECHO Telemedicine
Division of Allergy & Infectious Diseases
School of Medicine, University of Washington, Seattle

"What have you done for me lately? Informatics on the front lines of Hepatitis C, substance abuse, mental health complications, and community-based primary care"

Abstract: Hepatitis C is the second leading cause of liver failure behind alcohol consumption. In contrast to HIV, where ~80% of HIV positive individuals know their diagnosis, only ~30% of patients with Hepatitis C are aware of their disease. If left untreated, ~20% of patients with HCV develop liver cirrhosis, which is vastly more expensive to treat and potentially lethal. Exacerbating the public health problem is that end stage liver disease is expected to quadruple in the next 10 years. Unfortunately, a recent Institute of Medicine review determined that primary care providers are radically under-resourced to deal with the problem, especially in rural locations serving disadvantaged populations who bear the disproportionate burden of HCV. In this talk, I present our approach to this problem through Project ECHO, a community-based informatics research project. A distinguishing feature of Project ECHO is it's "bottom up" approach, starting with a highly flexible model that leverages lightweight videoconferencing solutions to build primary care capacity to screen, diagnose, and treat HCV in community settings. In this talk, I discuss the value of this approach and outline an emerging informatics research agenda for community-based management of HCV and other complex chronic diseases.

Kenton (Kent) T. Unruh is the Program Administrator for Washington State Project ECHO (Extension for Community Health Outreach), a research collaboration between the UW Division of Allergy & Infectious Diseases and the University of New Mexico. In addition to administrative and research duties, Kent serves as a Program Operations Specialist for Telemedicine and is responsible for deploying and managing telemedicine operations to support primary care clinicians in rural clinics who partner with Project ECHO. Kent received a Ph.D. in Information Science and completed a post-doc in the Division of Biomedical and Health Informatics at the University of Washington. He holds a masters degree in Information Technologies from the McCormick School of Engineering, Northwestern University and a BA in computer systems from Goshen College (IN).   Prior to coming to the University of Washington, Kent was Director of the Erie Technology Center: a non-profit charged with developing novel information-technology infrastructure and end-user resources for critical need immigrant populations in Chicago.