

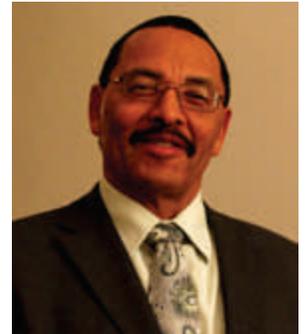
VRPM: An SMP Point of View

SMPs Darrell Elliott (Kansas) and Erin Weir (Illinois) serve on the steering committee that advises on the development of the Volunteer Risk and Program Management (VRPM) project. Here's their take on some key questions.

Darrell Elliott

Why is this program important?

The SMP program has grown to a national visibility in the fight against health care fraud. The result is the need for greater consistency, quality, accountability, a safe work environment for volunteers and better management of volunteers by SMP programs. While attending the 2009 SMP National Conference I learned that one bad volunteer could have disastrous results for SMP projects across the country. This is an opportunity to provide consistency and strengthen our national infrastructure.



Darrell Elliott

How actively has the SMP voice been heard building this program?

As an SMP Volunteer Risk and Program Management steering committee representative I am extremely proud to be a part of a process that has allowed SMP projects to voice their needs and concerns and provide input, beginning with the 2009 national conference. Opportunities to be heard continued with the regional conference, the selections of two state programs, a project officer and the Resource Center. Many SMP project coordinators have called, e-mailed and visited with steering committee members. A big thanks to Barbara Dieker, the AOA and the SMP Resource Center for their insight to facilitate SMP voices to be heard. And a special thanks needs to go out to Linda Graff and Steve McCurley for their expertise and willingness to ensure the SMP VRPM project reflects the needs and concerns of SMPs nationwide.

Can SMPs contact you for questions?

Simply stated, "Yes." Please continue to contact a steering committee representative, AOA project officers or the SMP Resource Center. All can provide answers or resources about the VRPM project.

Erin Weir



Erin Weir

What is the benefit of the phased-in process?

The policies are being issued in phases so that each SMP will be able to devote the time and resources necessary to implement each set of policies. We understand that it takes time and effort to really develop thorough risk management and volunteer program management, so we wanted to make sure that each SMP will have time to work on each piece. Also, by implementing policies in stages, SMPs can more easily gain “buy-in” from partner agencies and existing volunteers – in general, people will be more open to slow, gradual change than to being hit with a large amount of change all at once.

What will the challenges of the requirements be, and how can SMPs overcome those challenges?

With any change comes challenges, and while I am confident that implementing these new policies will be critically beneficial for our program, I know that we will likely face some difficulties along the way. For example, one challenge to implementing new policies in an existing program is that “veteran” volunteers will have to learn and abide by new policies. Some volunteers may not be happy about this at first, but this is a challenge that can usually be overcome with appropriate communication and training. Another challenge for some SMPs may be paying for the cost of implementing certain policies, such as running background checks on volunteers. This is one of the reasons that we are phasing in these policies over time – so that SMP directors will have ample time to assess and realign resources as necessary to meet the requirements. Finally, some SMPs may face challenges in presenting new SMP policies to program partners, boards of directors or executive staff at SMP agencies. Fortunately, Linda Graff, Steve McCurley, the Center and the VRPM steering committee will be developing and sharing resources with the SMP network to guide us in facing those challenges.

What benefits do you see in implementing risk and program management policies in your state?

I am very excited to implement these new policies in Illinois because I know that they will make our program stronger and more resilient to the challenges that all volunteer programs face over time. Having these policies in place will help us recruit volunteers, as both incoming and current volunteers will be able to see that we are a stable, dedicated, consistent program. The new policies will also help us enhance the quality of service that we provide to Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries in that we will be able to ensure that our volunteers have been thoroughly screened and trained to provide SMP outreach and assistance. We will even be able to incorporate volunteers into new, more advanced roles within our SMP program, as we will have the policy and procedural foundation to ensure that we provide those volunteers adequate training and support. ●