

Case Study

Patient Registry Drives Care Improvement at Westshore Health Network

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Challenge

Chronic disease has a voracious appetite, consuming vast amounts of health care resources in this country. A key to keeping costs under control – and patients healthier – is to effectively manage illnesses such as diabetes, kidney disease and heart conditions. At Westshore Health Network, a registry now tracks patients and their chronic diseases to ensure that preventive measures are performed.

A PHO affiliated with Mercy Health Partners (Muskegon), Westshore Health Network encompasses 216 independent and employed physicians that comprise a diverse range of solo practices and physician groups, younger doctors and more experienced ones, DOs and MDs, and settings that include rural, suburban and urban.

Solution

Over the past few years, Westshore has been rolling out a patient registry called WellCentive at the physician offices. WellCentive can improve quality of care by helping to detect missing services. It is also used as a reporting tool to provide data to physician incentive programs as well as to the individual physician. In this way, doctors are motivated to improve performance

Paul Ponstein, DO, Medical Director, said, “This project came out of the need for clinical quality and to participate effectively with payer incentive programs. We saw the challenges of quality reporting on the horizon and asked ourselves, how do we meet these challenges?”

At its simplest, a registry is a list of patients and their clinical data such as conditions, medications, test results and procedures. The WellCentive registry currently contains just under 100,000 names. As time goes on, the registry grows as data continues to be added.

Results

“As we populate the database and capture data, we know we’re making clinical improvements,” said Dawn Cole, Quality Management Specialist. “That’s very exciting.”

Cole added, "The data is updated daily from patient visits and interfaces with the lab. For example, we can access the entire diabetic population of our network to see if those patients have had their LDL checked and whether it was in range. Because the registry is web-based, it's accessible to all offices."

WellCentive has been rolled out in 46 of Westshore's 56 primary care physicians. Knowing that one size does not fit all, Westshore customized WellCentive to the particular needs and resources of each office. More recently, Westshore will be implementing the registry in three specialty areas this year: podiatry, ophthalmology/optometry and ob/gyn.

At each patient visit, WellCentive produces a summary sheet that shows overall health status, evidence-based indicators such as when labs need to be drawn, and a host of other data that help patients and physicians manage a chronic condition. The registry also includes education tools so a physician can advise a newly diagnosed diabetic patient, for example, on lifestyle changes.

Ponstein noted that some pay-for-performance programs have focused on organizations that are building the infrastructure necessary to drive quality improvement across the board and not just for their own customers. "WellCentive encompasses all patients, not just one payer's group." WellCentive also interfaces with payer registries, providing yet another level of capability and efficiency.

As a result, all the primary care physicians within Westshore now have Health Information Technology (HIT) capabilities available. Ponstein pointed out that an EHR normally costs around \$35,000 to \$40,000 in the first year of implementation, excluding productivity losses. "First-year costs for implementing the registry are \$1,000," he said. "WellCentive, like electronic prescribing, fits well into the modular plan of implementing health information technology."

He admitted, however, that physicians at first resisted the effort. "But we slowly eased in and gave the doctors the tools to plan ahead for the implementation. Their fears soon subsided. And as a network, WellCentive has given us insight as to what our offices really need from us as a PHO. Daily, we still learn things."

Westshore Health Network won an Excellence and Innovation award for the WellCentive program at the 2007 Trinity Health Annual Conference.

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