

Mercy Clinics

Managing Patients with Multiple Chronic Conditions

Mercy Clinics aims to improve preventive and complex chronic care for all patients served and initially focused on diabetes and hypertension.

Established in 1983, Mercy Clinics, Inc., is based in Des Moines, Iowa, and covers the greater metropolitan area. In 2010, Mercy's 50 clinic locations provided 878,000 patient visits. The medical staff comprises 150 physicians in 10 specialties; 70% are in primary care. Within the context of the medical home, Mercy Clinics aims to improve preventive and complex chronic care for all patients served and initially focused on diabetes and hypertension. Mercy Clinics has adopted a person-centered philosophy that supports a patient-focused medical home, which provides coordinated care across providers and sites and embraces Wagner's Care Model and Institute of Medicine (IOM) "Aims for Improvement."

The centerpiece of its Chronic Care Management Initiative is the RN Health Coach. The introduction of Health Coaches in January 2006 resulted in not only a 51% increase in diabetes visits, a 178% increase in microalbumin testing, and a 46% increase in HbA1C testing but also saw increases in comprehensive care procedures, such as complete physicals, immunizations, blood testing, and mammograms. The Health Coaches also help physicians and nurses with workload.

Workflow changes in the process for returning lab results include:

- Decreased interruptions
- Improved quality
- Reduced incoming lab result calls by 72%

Project Goals

The goals of Mercy's Chronic Care Management Program include:

- A whole-person orientation that provides or arranges for all of the patient's health care needs
- Systems to help patients receive all recommended evidence-based care that they can benefit from and wish to receive
- Registries to track all patients' chronic care and preventive health care clinical goals
- Team-based care coordinated by Health Coaches and overseen by physicians
- Self-management support and ongoing relationships with coaches to help patients meet their goals
- Safety improved by processes built into the system
- Improved access and options for patient communication with physicians and staff

Recent Improvements and Outcomes

Added improvements include implementation of Mercy's accountable care organization (ACO). The Clinics are currently part of a Shared Savings Program with Medicare and also have an ACO agreement with the largest commercial insurer in Iowa. Mercy's registry has been updated to include a Risk Manager along with a Population Manager, who now runs internal reports not only of quality outcomes but also of cost and utilization.

Sustaining Strategies

Mercy achieved many of its goals and continues work on two of them: building safety into its system and improving access and communication options. It is also working to build alerts and standardized process into its electronic health records (EHRs), which have proved to be challenging. A patient portal will be running in 2014, and the final goal of improving patient communication and access with the team will be achieved at that time.

The continued focus enables the Health Coach Nurses to focus fully on their work with patients without the worry of being pulled into urgent needs of the clinic. This is made possible by making the RN Health Coaches employees of the ACO rather than the clinic.

The former Quality Committee has now become the ACO Quality Committee. This committee meets monthly and is comprised of physicians, NP/PAs, clinic managers, administration/leadership, and Health Coaches. It reviews new evidence-based guidelines and uses these to build standardized practices. These are reviewed periodically with a focus on adherence to the most recent recommendations.

Cost/quality reports are now run monthly and distributed to each physician and each clinic. The information is formatted as a dashboard and includes each physician's quality outcome scores as well as the cost of care they provide to their population of patients, risk-stratified for a per-member-per-month (PMPM) amount. These results are unblinded within the clinics, which allows providers to hold each other accountable for quality care that utilizes services appropriately.

Future Plans

Another challenge facing Mercy is how to provide consistent, medical home-based care to all patients—even those who utilize its Urgent Care clinics exclusively. These patients are attributed to the system, and as such, ways to provide whole-person care to those who have not established a primary care provider are needed. Mercy is working with the clinic management team, Health Coaches, and Urgent Care providers to find ways to establish these patients within the medical home. At the very least, if they cannot be established, means are being sought to alert the team to the needs of these patients even if they are not connected to a particular Urgent Care visit (eg, preventative screening such as mammograms).

Mercy plans to improve communications across its software systems. EHR currently provides a partial nightly load of discrete data into its registry, and the billing system provides a weekly load of services billed. The addition of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform used for Care Coordination has enhanced its abilities to clearly identify the resources surrounding each patient. It is able to track its population of patients to determine who is most at risk and address barriers proactively. With these systems in place, Mercy is able to gain a more complete picture of what the patient deals with on a daily, monthly, and yearly basis.



Lessons Learned

Change is a constant. Mercy Clinics, Inc., faces the challenges that ongoing change brings. Those challenges are more manageable when segmented. The organization is once again reminded that no one person can do everything. An entire team is needed in order to provide the best whole-person care for its patients. In the end, 2 truths that the system holds dear are to constantly improve and to do what is best for the patients it engages with. If these 2 truths are upheld, Mercy is confident that patients will have healthier and happier outcomes, and as an organization, Mercy will take pride in the care it gives.



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