

Large Orange County IPA Commits to Intensive Quality Improvement Effort

By Diane Stewart, Director of Performance Improvement at Pacific Business Group on Health



One of California's largest physician organizations striving to be the best in every aspect of patient care isn't satis-

fied with its patient satisfaction ratings. What do they do to improve? Monarch Healthcare currently services

nearly 175,000 Orange County residents. With approximately 2,500 physicians, contracts with all the major health plans, and relationships with 20 hospitals, the IPA is a major player in the Southern California health care market with a commitment to being a leader in quality.

"We are striving to be in the top 10% of physician organizations, but our patient satisfaction results weren't where we wanted them to be. We knew we needed to improve, but we didn't have all the tools to do it," said Rebecca Snakowski, Manager of Performance Improvement. Joining the Patient Satisfaction Collaborative — a program offered by the California Quality Collaborative (CQC) — gave Monarch the opportunity to gather practical tools for improving their scores.

Guided by a multi-stakeholder leadership group including CAPG along with Blue Cross, Blue Shield, HealthNet and Pacific Business Group on Health (PBGH) as well as leaders from Lumetra, academic medicine and public health, CQC's goal is to advance the quality, service and efficiency of patient care in the state. The approach: expert programs like this topic-specific collaborative that offer access to national experts and leading physician peer groups to spread best practices and evidence-based, patient-centered care. "Improving patient care is Job One for our members," says Don Crane, CEO CAPG, "and working alongside the plans and purchasers to get results is job one for us."

A 10-person team participated in the



CQC Patient Experience Collaborative from Monarch, including Snakowski and two practicing physicians and office managers from large practices. Dr. Clyde Wesp from Southern Orange County Pediatric Associates (SOCPA) and Dr. Lee Burnett from Oso Family Medical Group attended multiple all-day, on-site trainings and teleconferences, and collected and reported monthly patient experience survey results.

Snakowski reports that the Monarch team was determined to get everything they could out of the collaborative — which meant fully engaging in every aspect of the work. “What we learned is that we can’t half-commit; we have to go in all the way. That means participating fully in every on-site session, and submitting all the required data every month to help measure our progress along the way.”

The result? Dr. Wesp and Burnett were highly engaged physicians in the group, and showed breakthrough improvements in patient satisfaction compared with their baseline measurement. For one measure, in which patients rate the overall level of care on a scale of 0-10, Dr. Wesp leaped from 8.4 to 9.1, while Dr. Burnett jumped from 7.4 to 8.9.

These numbers have real implications in an environment where 30% of Pay-for-Performance incentive dollars are based on the annual Patient Assessment Survey (PAS). For Monarch physicians, the numbers have an added significance, as physician bonuses are also based in part on their PAS scores.

Participants in the collaborative were given practical advice based on tested practices employed in various types of patient-care settings. “They encouraged us to tailor the recommendations

so that we could find the right fit. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution, so it was very helpful to hear the perspectives of different practicing physicians from around the state to find out what is working — and not working — for them,” said Snakowski.

Dr. Wesp and Dr. Burnett both made a number of tangible changes in their practices with the goal of improving patient access and doctor/patient communication. Some of these changes were significant, but others were minor. “We found that even some simple steps — like previewing a patient’s chart before going into the exam room, finding out what a patient prefers to be called and greeting them by name, or asking them ‘what else?’ at the of the exam — can make a big difference in how satisfied patients are with their care,” said Snakowski.

After seeing significant improvements in their own practices, Dr. Wesp and Dr. Burnett are now working to spread the word to other physicians in

the IPA, while Melanie Jackson, Dr. Wesp’s office manager, is helping to train other Monarch office managers. Monarch is focused on spreading what they learned in the collaborative to the entire IPA. They have developed a detailed toolkit and training session that is available to all Monarch physicians and office staff, with an incentive program attached. “The information we’re giving physicians is light on theory, and heavy on practical take-aways. This is exactly what our physicians and office managers are looking for, and we’re getting rave reviews.”

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PBGH represents large public and private purchasers of health care in California and works with CAPG to advance the quality and affordability of health care. ■

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