

The Medical Home Model and Population Health Management in a Large, Vertically Integrated Health System

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KEY POINTS:

- Team-based care has been a key factor in achieving high clinical quality, patient and staff engagement, and lower costs at Group Health.
- The team must have a primary care orientation, be interdisciplinary, have specialty support, and be coordinated through an effective electronic medical record.
- When spreading new models such as the patient-centered medical home across multiple locations, care teams must retain autonomy and the ability to adapt those models to local circumstances.
- For transformation to occur, Group Health found it necessary to challenge and redefine constraints of place (where care can happen), who does the work, and how communication among and between providers and patients is best accomplished.
- Promoting patients' use of shared electronic health records, including electronic communication, engages patients, maintains continuity, and improves access.

Group Health Cooperative, one of the leading integrated health systems in the country, is a member-governed, nonprofit healthcare system.* Founded in 1947 and based in Seattle, WA, Group Health provides medical coverage and care to around 630,000 residents in Washington State and North Idaho. Care is provided by Group Health physicians and other clinicians at 26 Group Health-operated medical facilities. In service areas where Group Health doesn't own facilities, and for plans offering more choice, a network of nearly 9,000 community clinicians and 41 hospitals meets member healthcare needs. Group Health has a national reputation as a pioneer in evidence-based medicine, using information technology to improve care, applying research to clinical practice, and defining the ideal model for delivering care for patients with chronic diseases. Group Health's doctors and clinicians include primary care physicians (family physicians, pediatricians, and internists), behavioral health providers, and more than 700 specialists trained in more than 60 medical specialties and subspecialties. Prepayment aligns patients, providers, and the financing mechanism around similar goals.

Dr. Chapman described a successful shift to population health management within GHC's large vertically integrated health system. Responding to the challenges of provider burnout and some declining quality measures, an innovation team spent two years focused on redesigning delivery and investing resources at one outpatient medical center. The resulting approach was referred to as the Group Health medical home. A key to their success was implementing a team-based care model with a continued focus on primary care, supported by specialty care, and team coordination through electronic medical records.

To help patients manage chronic conditions, the care teams created templated care plans and standing orders. Through patient records and registries, the care teams identified at-risk patients and reached



out to encourage them to seek care. The clinic created multiple access channels for its patient population, including secure online communications. Today, about two-thirds of Group Health's care is delivered virtually, rather than face-to-face.

Group Health has since spread this approach to 26 clinics, and learned that in order to sustain the good results, relationships must be built in three ways. One, autonomy matters. Care teams must be given the leeway to adapt and evolve so that they feel ownership around the protocols and guidelines they are using. Two, to inspire care teams and meet the expectations of patients for their care, the focus of work must remain on the customer and not solely on meeting quality measurement metrics. Three, most importantly, all transformations take time, and investments must be made in time and relationships to allow change in systems, change in clinics, and change with patients. Successful innovation happens when constraints—such as place, who does the work, and how communication happens—are systematically challenged and redefined.

*In February 2017, Group Health was acquired by Kaiser Permanente, and is now the Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Washington.

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