



The Impact of Continuity of Care on Quality of Care

Research shows that patients who receive optimal continuity of care have “better healthcare outcomes, higher satisfaction rates, and the health care they receive is more cost-effective.”¹ Yet, achieving continuity of care in and between care settings—inpatient, outpatient, community—can be a challenge.²

The reasons why fragmented care is so prolific are many and complex. The growth of specialization, the increase in patient financial responsibility, and a shortage of physicians are all likely factors.³ A study published by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) projects a physician shortage of up to 124,000 by 2034.⁴ This means even longer hours and greater caseloads for clinicians, which can significantly impact care continuity and care quality.⁵

Care discontinuity is especially problematic when a patient is discharged from a hospital or emergency department. Research shows that nearly one in five patients experiences an adverse event within just three weeks of being discharged, 75% of which could have been prevented or alleviated.⁶ The three primary reasons are hospital-acquired infections, procedural complications, and adverse drug events.

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Patient hand-offs aren't the same as transitions of care. The former is a one-way activity that puts the onus of follow-up solely on the backs of patients and families who may already be overwhelmed trying to navigate a healthcare system that is not user friendly. Transitions of care, on the other hand, are closed-loop processes that require communication and collaboration between providers on both ends of the transition.



¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4979920/>

² <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2777855>

³ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2777855>

⁴ <https://www.fiercehealthcare.com/practices/physician-shortage-continues-to-widen-now-estimated-at-124-000-by-2034>

⁵ <https://www.ahrq.gov/prevention/clinician/ahrq-works/burnout/index.html>

⁶ <https://psnet.ahrq.gov/primer/readmissions-and-adverse-events-after-discharge>

A DIFFERENT APPROACH

Many forward-thinking organizations are making significant progress toward improving care continuity by partnering with multispecialty healthcare management experts. Hospitals benefit through improved patient flow, increased patient satisfaction, and a better focus on benchmarks and KPIs—all without adding work to existing staff.⁷ **Following are five capabilities hospitals and provider organizations should look for when choosing a healthcare management partner.**



Providers should look for a partner that can provide high-performing advanced practice providers (APPs) to work alongside existing physicians to help ensure continuity of care both within the hospital and during transitions of care. Physicians can focus on higher acuity patients while APPs can keep patients moving throughout the continuum.



The best partners are those that understand the importance of completing discharge summaries before a patient is released. This ensures that all pertinent information is received by the referring provider prior the patient's first post-discharge follow-up appointment. This mitigates the potential for missing, delayed, or incomplete information.



Another important capability is real-time communications. Choose a partner that uses a HIPAA compliant communications platform that includes text to proactively communicate with referring providers while the patient is being discharged. This removes the burden from the patients of having to reach out to the provider themselves to schedule a follow-up appointment.



The best partners should also be adept at managing transitions of care from ambulatory, long-term care and skilled nursing facilities, and other care settings into the hospital. They should be able to capture and relay information from the facility's EHR, including medication lists and review notes. This helps ensure the hospital has the information they need to provide optimal care without having to request and wait for critical patient information.



Another capability to consider is the partner's expertise in managing the financial and clinical care components of the hospital's program. Choose a partner that can provide experienced hospitalist medical directors who can manage these time-consuming processes so your management team can focus on day-to-day operations.



⁷ <https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/hospital-management-administration/3-ways-outsourcing-clinical-services-helps-the-bottom-line.html>

SUCCESS STORY

Since opening its doors in 1984, CommuniCare has become one of the largest post-acute care providers in the country. These facilities include skilled nursing rehabilitation centers, long-term care centers, long-term acute care hospitals, assisted living communities, and independent rehabilitation centers. The company's mission is to create a holistic combination of people and clinical programs to create a healing environment in which patients can thrive.

As CommuniCare facilities grew more complex, they recognized the need for a partner that could enhance the caliber of medical directorship, broadening the bandwidth of clinical competencies and specialties in their areas of expertise.

CommuniCare found this partner in Adfinitas Health. They chose Adfinitas Health in part because the company had recruited one of the leading geriatricians in the industry, a strong testament to the quality the partnership could provide. They also appreciated that Adfinitas had partnerships with some of the top referral hospitals in the area. This would enable CommuniCare to better maintain the continuum of care from the hospital to the post-acute setting.

Once the partnership was established, Adfinitas Health medical directors were integrated into CommuniCare facilities and became advocates for those facilities at local hospitals. When new patients arrive at a CommuniCare facility, there is now a warm handoff, a peer-to-peer connection made, and a continued growing relationship with the referring hospital.

Adfinitas Health has a deeper pool of medical directors, which allows them to provide an alternative should a CommuniCare medical director become unavailable. Recently, a medical director in a CommuniCare facility left on maternity leave and Adfinitas Health quickly appointed a temporarily in her place.

Adfinitas Health medical directors are very engaged, working between four and five hours per week in their medical directorship role. Most directors also carry a patient caseload, having a hands-on role in the care of patients. Adfinitas also provides nurse practitioners.



The partnership with Adfinitas Health has been very fruitful for CommuniCare. The largest impact they've seen has been a reduction of their return to hospital numbers because Adfinitas providers are equipped to treat patients in place. To achieve this, Adfinitas Health works collaboratively with providers rather than "drive them out." They work to build relationships and mentor other providers in the facility to deliver better patient outcomes.

Lastly, Adfinitas Health and CommuniCare facility leadership have regular calls to discuss topics such as risk management and quality. CommuniCare has found that the leadership at Adfinitas Health is always more than willing to come to a solution that fits everyone's needs. Adfinitas Health medical directors truly aim to become a part of the facility, not take it over.

"Since partnering with Adfinitas, one of the biggest noticeable changes is how the MDs are willing to integrate into the life of the facility and advocate for the facility at local hospitals."

Karen Thickman, DVP of CommuniCare



THE PATH FORWARD

We've made great progress in moving from an episodic care model to one that encompasses a patient's entire healthcare journey. Delivering continuity of care throughout that journey is key to improving outcomes and enhancing the patient experience. Partnering with multispecialty healthcare management experts like Adfinitas Health can help.

Adfinitas Health is a team of hospitalists dedicated to the communities and hospitals we serve, providing innovative, customizable services and value-based, collaborative care with an unwavering commitment to client satisfaction. We were early adopters of the interdisciplinary team (IDT) model to improve the patient care environment. IDT models enable our experienced providers to create individualized care plans to support better patient outcomes. By facilitating efficient communication, we are able to achieve patient treatment goals and help reduce 30-day readmissions and the length of patient stays.

With more than a decade of experience managing high-quality, cost-effective hospitalist and post-acute programs, we are able to improve outcomes, increase productivity, and extend quality services in each partner hospital and post-acute care center. Our services include inpatient, critical care, observation, palliative care, inpatient rehabilitation, surgical co-management/assisting and pediatrics.



Learn more about Adfinitas Health by visiting
www.AdfinitasHealth.com

