

Renewing Primary Care

Background:

- The Independent Practice Association (IPA) is a physician-directed managed care organization, which includes 95 percent of the physicians in Humboldt County, Calif.
- In 2002, the IPA implemented components of Ed Wagner's Chronic Care Model to improve the delivery of health care.
- The IPA has participated in larger pay-for-performance (P4P) efforts in California since 2002. In 2008, the IPA realized that their quality improvement results were stagnant compared to those achieved by large integrated delivery systems.

Idea:

As the IPA practices implemented the Chronic Care Model to improve the quality and reliability of their health care delivery, many physicians realized that inefficient processes produced missed opportunities with their patients. For example, practices had few methods to flag missing procedures (e.g., a mammogram) or track medications.

Action:

In November 2008, the IPA formed the Primary Care Renewal (PCR) Collaborative, which challenged practices to redesign their processes and care delivery. The Collaborative sought to improve patient health and clinician and staff morale. Practices were encouraged to rethink the team that delivers care, including all office staff in process improvements. To achieve their goals they:

1. Visited successful programs in Seattle and Portland to gather ideas,
2. Recruited practices to participate (15 of 25 practices joined the Collaborative),
3. Held a launch event with Ed Wagner and established sessions to train practices, and
4. Met monthly to discuss progress on improvement goals.





Resources Needed:

- Time commitment to participate in training sessions and check-in meetings
- Compensation for staff (medical assistants, receptionists, etc.) to attend meetings
- Faculty from outside Humboldt County, Calif., to provide guidance

Preliminary Results:

- Transformation of care delivery: “Getting it right the first time.”
- Lives saved through new processes: Though the effort is in an early stage, anecdotes from practices show that new processes to flag missing procedures, like mammograms or colonoscopies, provide early detection of cancer. Humboldt County, Calif., now has one of the highest mammogram rates in the U.S.
- Job satisfaction: Medical assistants report that they are more committed and now see themselves as an integral part of the care team.

Advice:

- Develop buy-in from practices to implement improvements.
- Start by measuring variation: Show practices that improvement is possible.
- Sell improvement as self-interest: Communicate that improving processes will make clinicians’ lives better, improve patients’ health and lower cost.
- Identify models of improvement that are working.
- Include medical assistants or front office staff in the team.
- Involve patients in improvement: For example, patients are the best ones to tell you what medications they are taking.

Humboldt County, Calif.

