

PrimeCare Medical Clinic

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The Arkansas Health Care Payment Improvement Initiative (AHCPII) is designed to improve the quality of care, improve patient outcomes, and control or reduce growth in healthcare costs. The AHCPII involves restructuring the system to incentivize quality outcomes. Patient-centered medical homes (PCMHs) are a primary strategy of this innovation. Design and implementation of the state's PCMH efforts have been led by Arkansas Medicaid with support from Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield, QualChoice of Arkansas, Centene/Ambetter, Medicare, Walmart, the State and Public School Employees Benefits Plans, and others. This study is part of a series of case studies spotlighting practice transformation to the PCMH model, emphasizing how individual practices have approached innovation and implementation. For more information and access to additional case studies, visit www.achi.net or www.paymentinitiative.org.

Opportunities for Innovation: Behavioral Health and Therapy Services

Arkansas's PCMH model incentivizes primary care providers by offering up-front financial resources for practice transformation and care management. The program also includes an annual opportunity to share in overall savings if practices meet clinical quality and financial targets. These resources have helped practices throughout the state improve care delivery within their clinics and incentivized providers to take responsibility for and better manage their patients' entire care experience. This includes not only care received in their primary care practice but also referrals and patient care that typically occurs outside of their clinic walls, including behavioral health services for patients with mental illness, substance abuse disorders, and other related issues. These conditions can lead to increased treatment costs and additional medical or disability-related issues for individuals.

PCMH Strategies for Managing Behavioral Healthcare

PrimeCare Clinic is a PCMH practice taking a new approach to behavioral health services. In an effort to provide more comprehensive care, the clinic hired Pamela Smith, a licensed counselor who now provides services within PrimeCare's North Little Rock location. This strategy has made it easier for patients to receive appropriate counseling services. "I am able to communicate directly with our doctors in assessing patient needs, and when patients come to the clinic I am right down the hall. I am able to quickly engage with patients and build rapport," said Smith. According to PrimeCare CEO Eric Booth, resources from the PCMH program enable this strategy. "Bringing in Pam was entirely a PCMH decision. Before this program we couldn't see how doing something like this would be financially justifiable," said Booth.



Pamela Smith, EdS, MSN, LAC, is a counselor who provides mental health services to patients within PrimeCare's North Little Rock clinic.

PrimeCare Clinic Profile

PrimeCare has clinic locations in Conway, Searcy, and North Little Rock. With a focus on preventive visits and walk-in care, PrimeCare clinics serve approximately 200 patients per day. PrimeCare has 22 staff members including four doctors and several advanced practice nurses and physician assistants. Having joined the PCMH program in 2014, PrimeCare is one of nearly 200 clinics participating in the state's multi-payer program, which supports enhanced data management and practice management techniques. Like all clinics in the program, PrimeCare is required to complete and maintain PCMH practice transformation activities to receive additional financial support on a per-member per-month basis. These resources are designed to help practices conduct PCMH activities such as providing 24/7 live-voice access to care and developing care plans for high-priority beneficiaries.

"When we looked at our high-priority patients, about three-fourths of them had a behavioral or mental health diagnosis. By providing counseling services in-house, we felt we could have a huge impact on our patient outcomes – which is what the PCMH model is striving for."
***Eric Booth, CEO,
PrimeCare Medical Clinic***

Patient-Centered Medical Homes

Through improved care coordination and communication, the goal of the Arkansas patient-centered medical home (PCMH) program is to help patients stay healthy, increase the quality of care received, and reduce costs. A PCMH accomplishes this by identifying and treating at-risk persons before they become sick. Success of the Arkansas PCMH program relies on statewide multi-payer participation, ongoing innovation, and achievement of a specific set of improvement milestones, such as 24/7 patient access to care via phone or email, use of electronic health records (EHRs), and development of customized care plans for each patient.

Tracking Patient Care for Team-Based Planning

By integrating behavioral health services into its clinic setting, PrimeCare has been able to better track patients' related conditions such as anxiety and depression. PrimeCare has begun using a behavioral and mental health screening survey to assess patient needs and track referrals. The tool is linked to PrimeCare's electronic health record (EHR), and results are automatically and securely sent to appropriate staff for assessment. Pamela Smith said, "I receive the screenings within the EHR, and I am able to make recommendations to the providers based on those results and the patient's medical record. We have collected hundreds of screenings and are now able to start looking at patient trends."

By implementing this process, PrimeCare is making progress towards several primary goals of Arkansas's PCMH program including the coordination of care across care settings, improved patient and family engagement, identification of high-priority beneficiaries, improved follow-up care, and use of EHRs.



Dr. Mitzi Washington is part of the PCMH team at PrimeCare's Searcy clinic.

Patient Engagement and Better Outcomes

When a primary care provider determines that a patient needs behavioral health services, it is often difficult to ensure that a patient actually follows through and obtains these needed services. Patients may be overwhelmed with mental health or related issues, or may perceive stigma associated with receiving counseling services.

PrimeCare has found its approach to rapid patient engagement has helped alleviate these factors. "There is a high no-show rate in traditional counseling referrals. With Pam here, she can have a quick initial consultation as part of the office visit and do things like give them breathing exercises and other tips, and they actually come back to see her," said Eric Booth.

In some cases, these techniques have helped to prevent unnecessary service utilization. "On several occasions I've been able to reduce panic and help avoid a patient trip to the emergency room," said Pamela Smith. For the benefit of PrimeCare's patients, the PCMH model has reinforced the linkage between mental and physical health. "As a former nurse, I saw a disconnect between mental and physical health care, and that was frustrating to me. The PCMH program has given me the opportunity to connect these two things, which I've wanted to do for years. Mental and physical health are strongly linked, and to negate either is not giving the best overall care," said Smith.

Spotlight on Referral Management: Central Arkansas Pediatrics
Another recent example of PCMH-influenced behavioral health strategies is a referral process implemented by Central Arkansas Pediatrics (CAP), a PCMH practice in Conway, Arkansas. In early 2016, CAP changed its therapy referral policy to require newly-referred therapy patients to choose one therapy provider for the initial therapy evaluation and a different provider for any subsequent therapy services. This approach separates the therapy provider from initial assessment of need, thus eliminating potential incentives for unneeded services. In this process CAP hopes to become more familiar with patients' overall care and better engage with patients and families.

Sustaining Quality Improvements

PrimeCare clinic has implemented new systems and care coordination activities in transitioning to the PCMH model. Like many practices in the state, PrimeCare is demonstrating the benefits of coordinated, team-based care to improve the overall patient experience. "PCMH has shifted the balance so that we are being rewarded for doing extra things for our patients, and it is pushing us to do innovative things," said Booth. As a recipient of shared savings for their 2014 performance, PrimeCare hopes to continue to use PCMH resources, including Medicare's recently announced Comprehensive Primary Care Plus (CPC Plus) program, to build on their success. Booth continued, "the incentives from the first year went a long way, and we have invested a lot in PCMH. We have applied for CPC Plus, and we hope these investments continue to help us provide better care for our patients."

This case study was compiled using information obtained from PrimeCare Medical Clinic. The Arkansas Center for Health Improvement was granted written permission to use this information.