

Patient satisfaction depends on a whole-practice approach

HealthStar Physicians PC, a better-performer in patient satisfaction in the Medical Group Management Association's (MGMA's) [*Performance and Practices of Successful Medical Practices: 2007 Report Based on 2006 Data*](#), began in 1995 when 10 primary care physicians formed one practice in the Morristown, Tenn., area. The group has grown into a 35-doctor multispecialty group that includes 12 nonphysician providers and 325 support staff in nine locations serving three counties.

Ancillary services

In response to the rise of managed care, the group sought and received a certificate of need from the state – no longer as easy to acquire – to allow it to provide:

- Magnetic resonance imaging services
- Computerized tomography
- Nuclear medicine
- Digital mammography
- Echocardiology
- Urgent care
- A sleep center

HealthStar also added a fellowship-trained orthopedist and an interventional radiologist. The group's leaders attribute high patient satisfaction rates to this comprehensive array of services. Many ancillary services are housed at one site that has ample parking and is open six days a week.

Patient satisfaction

The group regularly audits patient waiting times – from check-in to check-out – and shares the results with doctors. It trains staff on patient education and emphasizes timely responses to patient complaints, resolving issues within 24 hours of receiving a phone call.

Efficiencies

HealthStar maintains a high physician-to-staff ratio so that physicians can focus on patient care. Doctors may have up to three clinical support-staff members. Licensed practical nurses handle most patients' telephone inquiries, and hospital-based registered nurses help doctors with patient visits and paperwork.

The group emphasizes communication. Nonshareholders are invited to annual shareholder meetings. In addition to monthly board meetings, eight committees address electronic health records, finances, bylaws, publication relations and other areas.

The chief executive officer publishes a monthly executive update that informs providers of practice news, local medical and business events, legislative actions and trends that could affect the group.

Coding, billing and business matters

Monthly one-page dashboard reports detail two years of data for each provider, including collections, payer mix, volume, overhead percentages, expenses and ancillary services. The data are benchmarked to MGMA survey figures. The board reviews the reports.

Physicians and the board receive coding and chart audits. The billing director regularly updates providers on whether they're providing appropriate documentation for the level of services reported.

To bolster collections, the practice accepts cash, checks and credit/debit cards. It also provides financial counseling for patients.

Community outreach

Community relations form an integral part of the group's activities. It sponsors an annual health fair that serves 3,000 to 4,000 people and participates in indigent-care programs. HealthStar staff and physicians serve on hospital and community-organization boards. The practice formed a foundation in 2001 (with an independent board) that funds local charities and provides medical scholarships.

Technology

HealthStar leaders plan to implement an electronic health record (EHR) system in late 2009 – one that interfaces with hospital systems. To offset some of the implementation costs, the group plans to work with insurance carriers, which stand to benefit from the implementation of EHR.

HealthStar demonstrates that patient-satisfaction efforts get a boost by creating efficiencies in other areas of the practice.

The MGMA report, a benchmarking standard among medical groups for almost a decade, was produced using data from more than 1,520 respondents to the MGMA 2007 Cost Survey, as well as a supplemental questionnaire that assessed practices and procedures of better-performers.

Hear leaders of better-performing practices discuss their strategies and challenges in [adding ancillary services](#), an [EHR](#) and a [patient satisfaction program](#).

View a list of the [19 better-performing practices](#) that excelled in three performance management categories.

Purchase the MGMA [Performance and Practices of Successful Medical Groups: 2007 Report Based on 2006 Data](#).