

The Missing Triple Aim Factor: Clinical Satisfaction

Abstract: *The US health care system is the costliest in the world, accounting for 17 percent of the gross domestic product with estimates projecting that percentage will grow to nearly 20 percent by 2020 (Institute for Healthcare Improvement). At the same time, countries with health systems that out-perform the US are also under pressure to derive greater value for the resources devoted to their healthcare systems. Aging populations and increased longevity, coupled with chronic health problems have become a global challenge, putting new demands on medical and social services.*

The Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) is an independent not-for-profit organization that serves as a leading innovator, convener, partner and driver of results in healthcare improvement worldwide. IHI believes everyone should get the best care and achieve the best health possible; the IHI Triple Aim initiative is a framework developed to optimize health system performance. The Triple Aim is designed to simultaneously pursue three dimensions: improving patient experience of care, improving the health of populations, and reducing the per capita cost of healthcare.

In today's ever-changing world of healthcare, home health agencies have become accustomed to evolving their business models and everyday operations, to remain compliant, improve care and reduce costs. While the Triple Aim initiative takes action to improve three important aspects of healthcare, an important missing link in the chain is clinicians. Focusing on boosting clinician job satisfaction not only benefits the clinician, but the agency and patients in their care. The business world has long recognized that employees are their life blood, and if home health agencies can adopt this mentality, better care will come naturally.



By adding Clinical Satisfaction as a target in the Triple Aim of Lower Costs, Better Outcomes, and Better Patient Experience, the entire healthcare system will become more effective.

Introduction- the IHI Triple Aim

As health systems around the world face increasing demands to produce better outcomes, provide greater value from their allocated resources and reduce costs, the need for a consistent framework to optimize health care becomes more important than ever.

The Triple Aim is a framework developed by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) that describes an approach to optimizing health system performance. It is IHI's belief that new designs must be developed to simultaneously pursue three dimensions, which are referred to as the "Triple Aim": improving the patient experience of care (including quality and satisfaction);

improving the health of populations, and reducing the per capita cost of healthcare.

In the current healthcare landscape, no one is held accountable for all three dimensions of the IHI Triple Aim. To optimize the health of a population, all three Triple Aim dimensions need to be addressed at the same time.

Healthcare professionals in the US are no stranger to change. Many regulations and new initiatives they must conform to come down the pipeline frequently, and many struggle to keep up with the pace. That's why the IHI Triple Aim supports a gradual approach to change, based on six phases of pilot testing with organizations around the world. The recommended process change includes identifying target populations, defining system aims and measures, developing a portfolio of work that supports strong results, and rapid testing and scale up that is localized for the community and its conditions (Institute for Healthcare Improvement).

To meet its objectives of change, IHI believes it's important to leverage a range of community determinants of health, empower individuals and families, broaden the role and impact of primary care and other community-based services, and pursue a seamless journey through the whole system of care throughout a person's life. Through a concept design, the IHI describes the components of a system that would fulfill Triple Aim: focus on individuals and families, redesign of primary care services and structures, population health management, cost control platform and system integration and execution (Institute for Healthcare Improvement).

Organizations and communities that attain the Triple Aim will have healthier populations because problems and solutions are identified outside of acute healthcare. Patients can expect less complex and more coordinated care. Stabilizing or reducing the per capita cost of care for populations will give businesses the opportunity to be more competitive and reduce the pressure on publicly funded healthcare budgets.

In the US, there are many areas of health reform

“..WHILE INITIATIVES LIKE IHI TRIPLE AIM ARE GREAT WAYS TO STRIVE FOR BETTER CARE AND REDUCED COSTS, THERE IS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR MISSING: CLINICAL SATISFACTION.”

that could be furthered by Triple Aim, including: accountable care organizations (ACOs), bundled payments, new models of primary care, like patient-centered medical homes, sanctions for avoidable events, and the integration of information technology (Institute for Healthcare Improvement).

Implementing the Triple Aim in Home Health

The 2015 National Impact Assessment of Quality Measures Report from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), shows that delivery system transformation across the country has made progress in achieving the Triple Aim of providing better care, lower costs, and improved health.

The report analyzes CMS quality programs and the measures they use to tie incentives to quality. The agency found that 95 percent of 119 studied measures improved during the 2006 to 2012 study period. Also, 35 percent were high performing, meaning that the performance rates for the measures exceeded 90 percent in each of the most recent three years of available data (Buechner, M.). One recently implemented program from CMS, Home Health Value Based Purchasing (HH-VBP), aims to help achieve better health, better care and lower costs. The implementation of a Home Health Value Based Purchasing (HH-VBP) model is required by the Accountable Care Act and is a key component of CMS's plan to achieve the IHI Triple Aim.

Implementing healthcare IT projects that support the main objectives of the Triple Aim have a positive impact on reducing costs and improving care, and can help propel the healthcare industry's strive toward leveraging IT. In recent years, electronic

health record (EHR) implementation has become increasingly popular, with the assumption that such a system would make the user's job easier. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Cumbersome technology and a lack of training can have the opposite effect on productivity and worker satisfaction, leading to a negative impact on quality and cost of care (Marino, D.).

The Missing Link to Better Care

While initiatives like IHI Triple Aim are great ways to strive for better care and reduced costs, there is an important factor missing: clinician satisfaction. At the most basic level, a "happy" clinician is going to provide better patient care than a clinician who is unsatisfied in their work. Why? Because they want to.

This white paper will discuss the importance, and benefits, of clinician satisfaction, and strategies to achieve higher retention rates, all leading to better patient care.

The Clinician- Your Greatest Asset

You've probably experienced something like this: You go to checkout at a retail establishment, and instead of being greeted, engaged in conversation, and treated like the valued customer you are, you are subjected to employee complaints. Isn't your first thought, "That is so unprofessional?" And you'd be correct. Airing personal grievances about your employer, work environment, etc. is unprofessional; but, have you considered that the root of the problem is much bigger than the individual employee?

Many CEOs will tout, "Our people are our greatest asset," but very few executives manage to translate such words into action (Fortune). In the 1980s, Southwest Airlines set an unprecedented example when its founder and CEO, Herb Keller, proclaimed that the people in an organization are more important than the customers. Herb was able to create an innovative business model that supported his claim and today, Southwest Air is one of the most used case studies on employee satisfaction. Keller's method of management is widely adopted at top companies, but not often in healthcare. As a typically

"...EASY-TO-USE TECHNOLOGY CAN DO WONDERS FOR INCREASING CLINICAL SATISFACTION...IF THE TECHNOLOGY DOESN'T SIMPLIFY THE JOB, THE JOB MAY NOT GET DONE."

slow to innovate industry, today's home health agencies are not capitalizing on their most important asset – the clinician.

The nursing force in every healthcare institution defines the success of the company, and the same is true for home healthcare. As the "face" of the agency or institution, clinicians typically constitute the majority of staff who works around-the-clock on a shifting basis at inpatient settings, and performing four to six visits a day in home care settings. In fact, most all interaction between provider and patient is by a nurse (or aide). And once they are done with their patient visits, clinicians who are not equipped with technology that can help them complete documentation quickly can be slammed with "homework" at the end of each day. This not only makes for a stressed, tired clinician, but it decreases the accuracy of documentation, which can lead to decreased accuracy of coordinated care, higher denials and lower reimbursements.

As a result of poor clinician job satisfaction, a vicious cycle of high turnover is becoming a significant problem in the home care industry. During a time when the home care industry is the highest growth occupation, and as agencies strive to achieve the Triple Aim through value-based purchasing (VBP), you could argue that nurses are more responsible for the ever-important patient-satisfaction component than ever before. Plus, high turnover rates are costly because of recruiting and training time and costs. If home health agencies can reconsider the value of their clinicians, and put strategies in place to increase job satisfaction and retention, better care will naturally occur.

Strategies for Increasing Clinical Satisfaction

Higher clinical satisfaction results in better care, but the lower turnover rates provide several tremendous benefits as well (Brothers, S.):

- Recruiting time and cost savings – Less money and time is being devoted to onboarding new clinicians, training them on any technology solutions used, and getting them up to speed on patient care plans.
- Onboarding and training support – Experienced clinicians know the ins and outs of the company and can assist when new employees come onboard.
- Better relationships with clients – The longer a clinician cares for a patient, the greater the bond formed will be; clients will trust the clinician and the agency providing care, and the clinician will have a greater sense of pride in their work.
- Quicker note of change in condition – This is a result of greater clinician-patient relationships; clinicians who are with a patient for their entire care process come to know the patient and will spot an abnormality or change immediately.
- Understands management expectations – Clinicians are invested in helping achieve the company's goals, and they know the role they play.

There is no one size fits all solution for increasing clinician satisfaction. However, there are standards that can be customized to fit the unique business model and culture of any home health agency. Below are some strategies to consider as provided by Sharon Brothers of the Institute for Professional Care Education (adapted from a presentation delivered at the National Association for Home Care & Hospice's 2016 Annual Meeting and Exposition (Brothers, S.):

1. Know and track your retention – What is the industry average, how does your agency compare, and what goals can you set to improve retention rates?
2. Provide training for all employees - Generally speaking, 25 percent of all employees leave their jobs mainly due to lack of training and learning opportunities. On the other hand, companies who provide learning opportunities generate about 26 percent more revenue per employee.

3. Provide training for leaders in the business – Oftentimes, people don't leave an organization because it's a bad company, they leave bad management.
4. Hire better – Create a more in-depth screening and interview process so the best candidate for each position may be selected.
5. Provide a pathway for growth – Employees want to know they have the potential to grow within an organization. Create clear paths for growth for each position, outlining the key milestones and goals that must be achieved at each level.
6. Engage – It's important to engage on a personal and professional level; showing interest in an employee's personal life makes them feel like they matter beyond what their daily role is in the organization. Professionally, take the time to collect feedback and listen to ideas.
7. Increase flexibility – This is a huge factor in today's mobile-friendly work environment; consider what options you might have to offer your employees, like having more control over their schedules.
8. Help relieve stress – Provide education on stress management and create a culture that supports laughter and friendships among employees.
9. Reevaluate your benefits – Today's job seekers aren't solely focused on the almighty dollar. Things like a flexible work schedule may outweigh the need for a higher salary.
10. Equip staff with technology – Home health technology has come a long way, and choosing to adopt easy to use technology can do wonders for increasing clinician satisfaction. Allowing clinicians to complete documentation while with a patient, or shortly after, alleviates the necessity for completing documentation during their personal time. This increases job satisfaction immensely. Remember this rule of thumb: if the technology doesn't simplify the job, the job may not get done (Marino, D.).

Conclusion

The IHI Triple Aim is focused on optimizing health systems around the world, designed to improve patient experience of care, improve the health of populations, and reduce the per capita cost of healthcare. One important factor missing from the equation is the clinician. Improving clinician job satisfaction leads to better care, without initiatives or regulations driving it.

The business world has long recognized that employees are their life blood, and home health agencies need to adopt this mentality. As the home care industry is the highest growth occupation, and as agencies strive to achieve the Triple Aim through value-based purchasing (VBP) and successful IT implementations, you could argue that clinicians are more responsible for the ever-important patient-satisfaction component than ever before. Why not tap into your greatest asset?

High turnover is a challenge for home health agencies. If agencies can reconsider the value of their clinicians, and put strategies in place to increase job satisfaction and retention, better care will naturally occur.

Additional Resources

Brothers, S. "7 Strategies for Reducing Turnover in Home Care". (September 2016). HomeCare & Hospice Annual Meeting & Exposition. Powerpoint Presentation.

Buechner, M. (2015, March 10). CMs Reports Progress Toward Triple Aim. America's Essential Hospitals. Retrieved from <https://essentialhospitals.org/policy/cms-reports-progress-toward-triple-aim/>

Human Capital 30: Companies that Put Employees Front and Center. (2016, May 8). Fortune. Retrieved from <http://fortune.com/2016/03/08/human-capital-30/>

Marino, D. (2014, March 4). 5 Keys for Hitting the Healthcare IT Triple Aim. HITECH Answers. Retrieved from <http://www.hitechanswers.net/5-keys-hitting-healthcare-triple-aim/>

The IHI Triple Aim. (2016). Institute for Healthcare Improvement. Retrieved from <http://www.ihl.org/engage/initiatives/tripleaim/pages/default.aspx>

About DeVero

DeVero provides a multi-service line healthcare platform that provides an easy-to-use, adaptable, and highly scalable solution that meets the emerging needs driven by the transformation of healthcare. Providers, payers and government organizations leverage DeVero to efficiently collect, share and integrate patient and population data from any location, using any device. Based in Silicon Valley and founded by tech and healthcare experts, DeVero was born to create innovative solutions to common business challenges. **Visit www.devero.com or call (800) 219-0664 to learn more.**