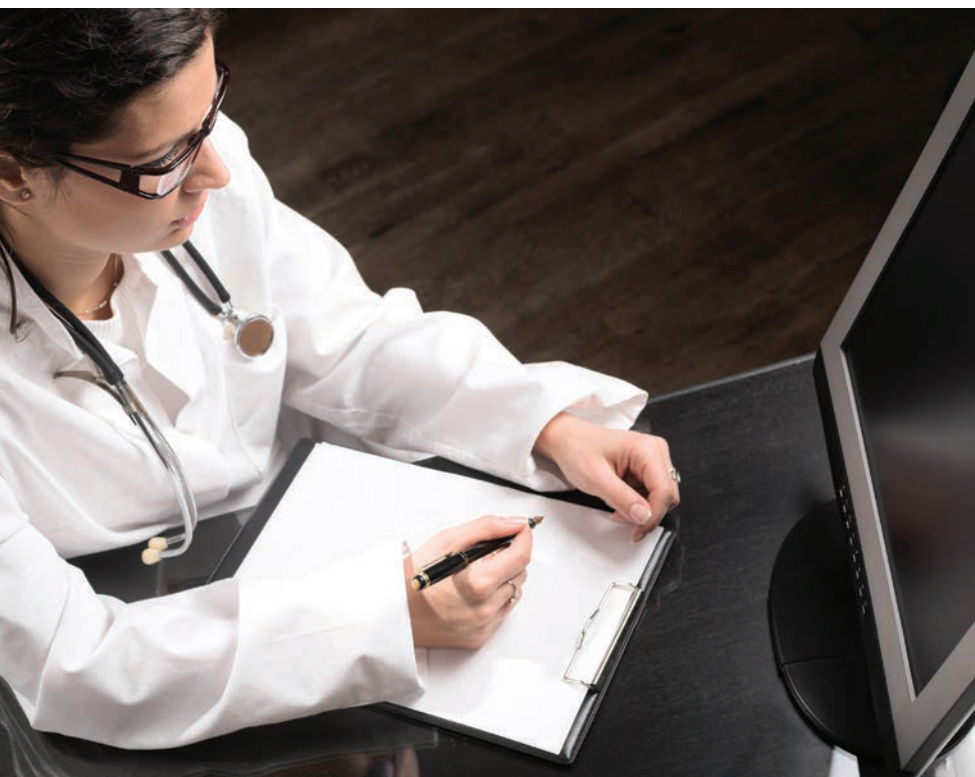# Role of the EHR in Achieving Patient-Centered Medical Home Recognition

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facilitating dynamic partnerships between patients and physicians is a key aspect of achieving recognition as a patient-centered medical home (PCMH™) under the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA). According to NCQA, a PCMH "is a healthcare setting that facilitates partnerships between individual patients and their personal physicians, and when appropriate, the patient's family." Among its important attributes, a PCMH guides business and clinical procedures, uses clinical decision support tools, and connects patients and members of the healthcare team.

Currently, there are three levels of recognition (Level 1, 2 and 3) and six must-pass elements a practice must achieve to be considered a PCMH.

NCQA's six elements are:

1. Access During Office Hours

2. Use Data for Population Management

3. Care Management

4. Support Self-Care Process

5. Track Referrals and Follow-Up

6. Implement Continuous Quality Improvement

An important factor in meeting these required elements and achieving PCMH recognition is a comprehensive electronic health record (EHR) solution. The technology helps practices integrate care including mental health and other disciplines, provide care management, and drive quality improvement. NCQA believes, "The health information system itself must be useful, and practices must use it to achieve the goals of coordination and high quality of care."

EHRs provide critical support in a practice's quest to achieve PCMH recognition. When used properly, EHRs can strengthen the physician-patient relationship and improve the quality of care patients receive. These benefits lead to better outcomes and more-involved patients with reduced costs over time.

How EHR Supports PCMH Recognition

Assessing and modifying practice workflows are important in preparing for PCMH recognition. EHRs supply the technology to standardize overall workflow for practices of any size. Integrated with practice management systems, EHRs can significantly streamline patient flow from check-in to departure. Additionally, EHR templates, forms, and drop-down lists simplify documentation. Importantly, these systems give providers easy and secure remote access to critical patient information when offices are closed or they are on call. Finally, practices can enhance patients' involvement in their own care and communicate with the healthcare team by using interoperability features of the electronic health record including patient portals and e-messenger capabilities.

For better care monitoring,

comprehensive EHR systems provide automated reminders and multiple modes of communication with patients via online, secure web-access for patients. To fulfill PCMH requirements for care management, practices can set reminders about high-risk patients with chronic illnesses who can benefit from additional care and counseling. In addition, the ability to track orders and receive results of laboratory and diagnostic imaging procedures improves the care coordination experience. These tools reduce medical errors and provide access to comprehensive clinical data.

EHRs have the ability to send electronic referrals to other providers or send patient records with attachments including: progress note, lab results, medical summary, and patient scanned documents. The referrals are generated from customizable reports allowing providers to track the date, time, and delivery status from patients' charts. Reports are sent directly to providers EHR inboxes through queries allowing to be received by physicians and for clinical decision support alerts at the point of care for patients who meet specified conditions. To improve patient monitoring, the reporting tools identify high-risk patients and patients with chronic illness who can benefit from additional care and counseling. New tools make it easier to enter data into the progress note by taking free text and transforming it into structured data. Providers enter the data through dictation or typing free text, and with one click, that information automatically populates the patient progress note in the appropriate field.

Using registries by groups of patients, the system allows for robust reporting as well as managing appointments and schedules, and streamlining medical billing. These registry tools are needed for population management and preventive care via healthcare quality measures.

Open Door Family Medical Centers

Open Door Family Medical Centers in Ossining, New York has been an innovator within the community health movement. With 78 providers across 9 sites who care for more than 40,000 active patients, Open Door provides quality primary health care and human services at affordable prices to the community, particularly low-income, underserved residents. Open Door required an EHR system that was affordable and feature rich. After an extensive search, in April 2007, Open Door went live with the eClinicalWorks EHR system to help the practice reach its ultimate goal of becoming a Level 3 PCMH.

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The system provides robust clinical and administrative capabilities, including UDS reports, sliding fee schedules, and the ability to track orders and receive results of laboratory diagnostic imaging procedures. Efficiencies gained from the eClinicalWorks implementation led an increase in visits per FTE of more than 10 percent; increased collections per visit, and decreased days in A/R. However, the greatest return came in early 2010.

In March 2010 Open Door received NCQA's highest level of recognition (Level 3) as a PCMH. Open Door achieved this recognition by improving the quality of care delivered, focusing on population health, and becoming more proficient at delivering consistent care at every patient encounter. Significant improvements in the care of patients with diabetes and hypertension were demonstrated with the majority of patients being well controlled (Hga1c < 7 and BP less than 130/80). eClinicalWorks provided the tools to enhance functionality throughout the practice and to

supply the documentation required for PCMH recognition.

Improving Safety, Access, Quality, and Patient Management

As early as 1996, when Open Door was using a paper-based system, an EHR system was identified as the best solution to manage unwieldy patient charts. An estimated 3% of charts were missing on any given day and many were not all that legible, posing significant patient safety risks. Adopting an efficient EHR system eliminated the daily concerns and improved patient safety. The system allows providers to have easy and secure access to critical patient information improving safety due to e-prescribing, allergy/interaction checking, and use of telephone encounters to document patient requests for refills of medication.

The EHR technology allowed Open Door to establish provider panels and guarantee that patients were consistently seen by their primary care provider. Clinical performance metrics were established for populations with chronic diseases to provide comprehensive care to patients. Electronic care planning tools, including feedback loops and robust reports, were utilized in conjunction with eClinicalWorks' EHR to improve quality with a preventative-care oriented electronic health record solution.

Patient access and continuity of care were enhanced throughout the practice, along with identification and management of specific populations. One key element required by NCQA was to provide the means to assist with patient/family self-management. Open Door now has better tools to support patients and their families in managing their care such as electronic referrals and electronic planning tools used to improve safety and speed of care.

Benefits beyond PCMH Status

Taking all the steps required to become a Level 3 PCMH has also provided an array of other benefits

to Open Door. Qualities of care and patient engagement have improved. Better chronic disease management has allowed Open Door to use staff and resources in a more focused way to meet the requests of patients to manage their specific care. As a result, patient satisfaction has been excellent as providers supply the best medical care possible. Providers now have the ability to organize care around patients and track care over time.

Ideally, a practice would like a full return on their EHR investment quickly. Open Door's EHR investment was fully recouped after only two years, due to increased productivity and receipt of clinical performance incentives. During those two years, Open Door not only won recognition as a Level 3 PCMH but was also presented with many other national honors, such as the recipient of the 2010 HIMSS Davies Award for

Excellence in the Community Health Organization category. The providers at Open Door quickly realized the important role of the eClinicalWorks EHR in helping them provide the most comprehensive medical care possible to patients.

Conclusion

A comprehensive EHR solution spanning the continuum of care for every patient offers multiple benefits to a medical practice and can be instrumental in PCMH recognition. Key attributes to look for in a solution include:

- Ease of use
- Customizability
- Access to clinical content
- Communication capabilities
- Unification of information

An EHR must provide the tools and education on the guidelines to meet PCMH standards and improve overall health care.

Lindsay Farrell, M.B.A., FACMPE, was appointed president and CEO of Open Door Family Medical Centers in 1998. She serves as treasurer of the Health Information Technology for Community Health, is a leader and founding member of the Health Center Controlled Network of New York, and is a member of the Board of Directors of the Community Health Care Association of New York State, of Hudson Health Plan, and of the Port Chester Council of Community Services.