HealthTexas Dominates List of Practices Improving Health Care with Technology

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HealthTexas Provider Network (HTPN) claimed 50 of the 80 physician practices recognized during the inaugural Texas Physician Practice Quality Improvement Awards program. The awards, presented by TMF Health Quality Institute, Texas Medical Association and Texas Osteopathic Medical Association, are given to physician practices in Texas that effectively use health information technology to improve care for patients through reliable delivery of preventive health services.

The award honors Texas physicians committed to improving clinical measures – including cholesterol screening, tobacco cessation counseling and cancer screenings, among others – with the help of technology. To be considered for the award, practices were required to demonstrate how they provided exemplary care and used health information technology in calendar year 2012.

“To have so many of our practices receive an honor from these three organizations, which are known for setting the bar when it comes to quality in medicine in Texas, is pretty remarkable,” says Cliff Fullerton, MD, MSc, HTPN chief quality officer and vice president of chronic disease for Baylor Health Care System.

The award, open to any Texas-licensed physician practice providing care for Medicare patients, is based on four components: using health information technology; focusing on patient education, early detection and disease management; publicly reporting data; and achieving top performance on nationally recognized clinical outcomes measures. Using health information technology to drive high-quality preventive services has been designated a priority for U.S. health care by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

Using EHR Since 2000

It’s also been a priority at HTPN since 2000, when the organization began using electronic health record (EHR) systems. Today, a majority of HTPN offices use EHR, a big reason the organization won a majority of the awards.

“We’re pretty proud of it,” says Chris Felton, director, HTPN Clinical Performance Excellence. “I think HealthTexas is really on the cutting edge. We are well down the road. It’s been quite a journey since we started focusing on preventive care.”

To be considered for the award, physicians had to prove that population care management practices were in place. For instance, HTPN-affiliated physicians cited their use of automated prompts that remind patients and nurses when a patient is due for a routine examination, such as a blood pressure screening or a colorectal screening.

HTPN-affiliated physicians also had to prove that they met at least two criteria in each of nine clinical metrics. For example, they had to demonstrate that at least 81 percent of their female patients had annual mammograms or that 80 percent of their patients had annual flu shots.

EHR, Felton notes, provided the hard evidence that HTPN had met the stringent criteria. Without it, she says, documenting compliance would have been nearly impossible.
Prevention Saves Lives

HTPN’s long-standing commitment to improving the delivery of clinical preventive services (CPS) is evident in a 2005 study by seven Baylor researchers. It measured the effects of using evidence-based CPS to prevent illnesses and deaths across 49 HTPN primary care practices in an ambulatory setting. The statistical analysis found that CPS prevented the following:

- 35 deaths and 97 incident cases of cancer
- 420 coronary heart disease events (including 66 sudden deaths) and 118 strokes
- 816 cases of influenza and pneumonia (including 24 hospital admissions)
- 87 osteoporosis-related fractures

The study notes that although the prevented deaths and illnesses weren’t observed by clinicians, caregivers, administrators or policymakers, the study’s real value has been to reveal that the unobservable is indeed statistically observable: CPS have substantial benefits in preventing deaths and illnesses.

“Technology is a big part of improving both quality and service in health care,” says Dr. Fullerton. “Over the last several years especially, HTPN has spent millions of dollars and countless hours making sure we get it right for our patients and the community.”

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