

# FOR PATIENT CENTERED PRIMARY CARE...

## *Partner with Your Patients*

*This series shares case studies on how primary care practices are engaging patients in improving the practice.*

As the lone primary care practice serving a 75-mile radius in rural Kentucky, Dr. Chuck Thornbury, Medical Director of **Medical Associates Clinic**, sees approximately 60-65 patients a day. After attending a LEAN training hosted by Toyota eight years ago, Dr. Thornbury was introduced to the world of quality improvement and how to approach health care from a systems perspective. Seeing potential for overlap, he's since instituted a culture of quality improvement within his practice, a necessity especially given the high volume of patients that remain under his care.

### **What was the issue?**

Serving a large geriatric population, having patients bring their medications during medical visits is extremely important since this population of patients often uses numerous medications. Despite having several physical cues in the waiting room and including this reminder in the instructions given at the end of the visit, patients were still not bringing their medication to their visits.

### **How did they engage their patients?**

The Medical Associates Clinic has Patient Quality Circles, quarterly forums where patients come together and contribute ideas and suggestions on how to improve processes within the clinic. When the question of how to improve the rates of patients bringing their medications to medical visits was brought to one of these meetings, patients sought to understand why bringing medications to their medical visits was important. One novel suggestion from the patients was to utilize the cards handed out at the end of every visit with the date of the next appointment.

#### **PRACTICE PROFILE**

**Name:** Medical Associates Clinic, Glasgow, Kentucky **Practice Type:** Rural, independent practice

**PCHM Recognition:** None

**Primary Care Provider Staffing:** 2 physicians, 1 PA

**Patient Visits/Year:** Several thousand patients

**Patient Demographics:** Serves 12 counties, several in the Appalachian Mountain region of KY

**Level of Engagement:** Organizational Design

## What was the result?

Acting on the comments generated at the quality circle meeting, appointment cards were redesigned and reprinted. The most prominent feature on the card now is “Please bring your medicines”, which has helped to increase the number of people bringing their medication and has made appointments run more smoothly.

Emboldened by this success, more patients have stepped up to volunteer their input regarding clinic processes. “We want people to be represented and to give us guidance regarding what’s valued and what’s not valued,” says Thornbury.

## What advice do they have for others?

Dr. Thornbury’s introduction to Toyota’s LEAN methods helped him establish a couple of important guiding principles for the practice. One guiding principle the practice lives by is that patients are the employers and that those who work within the health system serve at their bequest. Another one that follows from the first, is that patients are more likely to work effectively with the care team if they understand “why” a request, like bring your medications, is important to their health and well-being.

“Patients know something that I don’t know,” Thornbury explains. “I try to be humble and...work with them to solve as many impediments to help them become successful.”

### How can I learn more?

Learn more about [Medical Associates Clinic](#)

Visit the UCSF Center for Excellence in Primary Care [Patient Engagement page](#)

### Other resources:

[Institute for Patient and Family Centered Care](#)

### Thanks for the case study to:

Dr. Chuck Thornbury, Medical Director of Medical Associates Clinic



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