

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.

The Aligning Forces for Quality Initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation was a multi-year national effort to improve quality of health care through the engagement of providers, payers, and patients. The **Humboldt Independent Practice Association (IPA)** was one of 16 awardees and was selected as a rural partner. One aim of this initiative was patient engagement, but no roadmap was provided on how to get there. Humboldt IPA and partner organization, the California Center for Rural Policy (CCRP), rose to the challenge and, after years of trial, have since created a model program that others now try to emulate.

What was the issue?

The Humboldt IPA supported a community-wide quality improvement collaborative for primary care practices, and through this activity desired to meaningfully engage patients in developing patient-centered practices. To achieve this goal would require resources and external support for setting an infrastructure in place, both difficult things to obtain. Patient Family Advisory Councils (PFAC) are a common way that clinics structurally incorporate patient input, but this did not seem feasible due to the fact that this was a network of mostly small, rural, independent clinics. Clinic leaders were in need of additional resources and external support for patient engagement infrastructure, which was a significant challenge. This IPA set out to find creative ways to involve patients with a limited budget.

PRACTICE PROFILE

Name: Humboldt Independent Practice Association, Northern CA **PCHM Recognition:** N/A

Primary Care Provider Staffing: 1-2 per site, largest had 8

Participant Practices: Rural, small independent practices, some FQHCs

Level of Engagement: Organizational Design

Notable Highlight: Involving patients in rural practices with limited resources

How did they engage their patients?

The Humboldt IPA and CCRP developed a method to orient, train, and support “Patient Partners” to be positioned on the quality improvement team of each site that was participating in this collaborative. Each practice formed their own QI team - provider, front and back office staff, and patient(s) - and were assigned a quality improvement coach. In addition to the regular team meetings that each pod would have, patient

partners would also attend collaborative meetings, patient-only meetings, answer questions, talk through challenges of working with providers and practices, and were the thought leaders in creating workflows, such as how to schedule patients more appropriately.

What was the result?

Through this work, a comprehensive guidebook about implementing and patient centeredness has been drafted and is on its way to being finalized so that other sites will be able to use this resource on their path to integrating patient engagement in their clinics.

Beyond the tangible deliverables, there has been a change in perspective about what it means to engage patients. After the initial round of the project, practices were surveyed regarding practice satisfaction with the project and its impact on patient-centered care. Additionally, offline qualitative conversations were facilitated to ensure that the partnerships were going well and were meaningful to both the practices and patients.

Overall, the response was positive; site champions shared that this experience "lifted the veil on patient experience in real time - [it was] like having a two-person focus group all the time." One provider commented, "All these years I thought I knew what my patients were thinking. I didn't realize what I didn't know."

What advice do they have for others?

Engaging patients requires tremendous effort, but it is effort that is well worth the initial cost. "It has to be an intentional process. [You] can't rubberstamp it... [It] requires investment of resources, time, and human capital," says Jessica Osborne-Stafsnes, Grants and Program Development Manager.

How can I learn more?

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Thanks for the case study to:

Jessica Osborne-Stafsnes, Grants and Program Development Manager



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