



Fast Five with Joel Wirth

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Welcome to Fast Five—our monthly feature that spotlights an individual connected with the MaineHealth ACO. This month we had a chance to catch up with Joel Wirth for five quick questions.

You've recently joined the MaineHealth ACO as one of four regional physician liaisons, a role you're taking on in addition to your current leadership and clinical duties. What motivated you to become a liaison?

The MaineHealth ACO seeks to engage and support providers in advancing integrated, value-based patient care. It has a major focus on achieving the "quadruple aim" -- enhancing patient experience, improving population health, reducing costs and improving the work life of health care clinicians and staff. I have a longstanding interest in improving system level medical delivery through continuous quality improvement projects in Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine at MMC and MaineHealth. I've been fortunate to be involved with national program quality development through the Pulmonary Hypertension Association in DC. Understanding and addressing physician wellness has been an important part of our educational programs at MMC involving medical students, residents and postdoctoral fellows.

One of the liaison goals is to foster increased communication and cooperation between primary care providers and specialists. How do you think you can contribute to that goal?

All clinical and educational programs depend upon effective communication. We need to ensure a good understanding of the focus areas and goals of the ACO to engage and align providers and facilitate teamwork. We also need to better understand the real and potential barriers to achieving high value care. I think medicine is at a very interesting time relative to the accelerating expansion of clinical knowledge and rapid changes in information technology. This is coupled with pressures to increase efficiency and productivity. I think our existing clinical systems are still in their infancy and often contribute to provider and staff stress. We need a detailed understanding of the stressors that providers and staff face and find ways to assist them in order to reduce work-related burnout and improve clinical outcomes. Opportunities for improvement need to be sought out and changes implemented towards mutual success.

What's your top work priority right now?

It varies from week to week, but like most clinicians, staying on top of work is a high priority. Our group is working to meet patient care needs and maintain patient access. This is a challenge for those in our specialty

across Maine. I am also part of a dedicated group at Maine Medical Center working to reduce COPD readmissions and another at MaineHealth to develop Tele-consultation for COPD. Our Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension care and research programs also continue to grow.

Considering your busy schedule, how do you stay physically active?

I have biked the American Lung Association "Trek Across Maine" fundraiser eleven years in a row with "Team CMA" (a major motivator to stay somewhat fit). I also joined the new Portland Community Squash organization this spring. It's a terrific new facility and resource for our community and I'd encourage any lapsed old squash players like myself (or interested newcomers) to check it out.

Outside of work, what are you reading or listening to?

I'm a nonfiction nerd as family and friends will attest. I just finished "Atomic Adventures" by James Mahaffey about the history of nuclear development and Steven Radelet's "The Great Surge" about the impact of globalization in the developing world. I would recommend both.