

Local Hospitals Look to Person-Centered Care Model to Improve Outcomes

A multi-year collaborative launched by the Healthcare Association of New York State is helping hospitals and health systems adopt patient-centered care practices that have been linked with improved organizational culture, better patient outcomes and lower overall health care costs.

The association launched the initiative in 2019 with Planetree International, a nonprofit that trains and certifies health care organizations in its model of care. Twelve hospitals across the state participated. Of those, St. John's Episcopal Hospital in Queens and Saint Barnabas Health in the Bronx won Planetree certification.

In an outcome report released this month, HANYS noted that successful participants shared an organizational commitment to person-centered care; asked patients, families and staff what they could do better; emphasized staff wellness and empowerment; focused on the specific needs of their patient communities and worked directly with patients, families and frontline health care workers to co-design improvements.

"Health care in the past was things you provided to the patient," said Christina Miller-Foster, HANYS' senior director of quality advocacy, research and innovation. "Under a person-centered care framework, health care is something that's provided in partnership with the patient. It's really shifting that mindset."

Miller-Foster said the association had tried several initiatives to help its members implement a person-centered care model—with limited success. This time the association took a page out of Northern Westchester Hospital's playbook, which first earned Planetree certification in 2007 and credited the process for helping it achieve excellence in patient satisfaction and communication-related metrics.

A \$250,000 grant from the New York State Health Foundation, a nonprofit, enabled the association to cover participants' costs related to the certification process.

Star Rivera, chief patient experience officer at St. John's Episcopal Hospital in Far Rockaway, said one of its major undertakings during the collaborative was launching a care partner program. Under the program, all patients identify a "care partner"—often a family member—who will be looped in at all points in their care journey. Rivera said this model goes beyond the information sharing that hospitals typically do with a primary caregiver when a patient is discharged.

"It's about including them in decision making but also giving them access—limiting those barriers like visiting hours," Rivera said.

Continuing the emphasis on partnership, the hospital also established a patient-family advisory council that meets monthly to discuss targeted areas for improvement. Rivera said a new continuity-of-care process, which the hospital based on guidance from a separate patient-family council focused on behavioral health, has already improved the number of patients who follow up for a post-discharge appointment by 30%.

Rivera said that kind of community engagement is key to advancing health equity, because patients and families have an outlet to use their experiences to inform efforts to combat inequities.

Maureen Eisner, vice president of patient experience for Saint Barnabas, said feedback from its patient-family advisory committee—also established as part of the collaborative—prompted it to launch a newsletter. Its goal is to spread the word to the community about little-known programs, such as a teaching kitchen and a rooftop garden.

The hospital also launched what it calls the G-nite program, which charges physicians with discussing care plans for the following day with patients and families and making sure everyone is on the same page.

“We don’t ask, ‘Do you have any questions?’ We ask, ‘What questions do you have for me?’” Eisner said.

Miller-Foster said many participants in the collaborative struggled to achieve certification due to the pandemic and employee shortages, because implementing the Planetree model is staffing intensive. HANYS, which represents 239 hospitals and health systems statewide, among other types of health care facilities, is continuing to support efforts to adopt person-centered care models across its member organizations by imparting lessons learned.

She said the payoff for hospitals is evident among patients and health care workers: Organizations with such a model see improved patient experience, better outcomes in terms of metrics like readmission rates and more engaged workplaces with lower turnover rates.

But, she cautioned, “it’s a rigorous process.”

Planetree International, a nonprofit, was founded in 1978 and is headquartered in Derby, Conn.