

Listening to Employers: How Healthcare Systems Can Support Population Health

On Thursday, April 20th, the Central Texas Chapter of the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE) and the National Forum for Latino Healthcare Executives (NFLHE) hosted the continuing education event, “Listening to Employers: How Populations Can Support Population Health”. Tre McCalister, EdD, Central Market Region Leader, Mercer Total Health Management Consulting presented, “How Employers are Helping to Drive Healthcare Transformation and Population Health Improvement.” A panel discussion followed, featuring Ed Bernacki, MD, MPH, Executive Director, Dell Medical School Healthcare Solutions, Sara Taylor, Director, Seton Health Alliance and Nancy Butterfield, Benefits Manager and was moderated by Ed Melendez, MBA, Principal, TMO Consulting.

Kicking off the population health management discussion, Tre’ introduced the Mercer Quality Improvement Collaborative to the audience. In this initiative, Mercer is partnering with employers to target excessive cost, enhance provider communication and engage employers interested in quality of care. By collaborating with employers in the Pacific Northwest, Charlotte, North Carolina and Dallas, Texas, Mercer hopes to decrease unnecessary procedures, improve outcomes and elevate the quality of care. Currently in their early stages, these collaboratives face similar data and interoperability issues found in the healthcare realm; however, preliminary results are encouraging.

In keeping with the population health theme, Ed Melendez introduced the, “Listening to Employers: How Health Systems Can Support Population Health” panel. Following introductions, he inquired how healthcare organizations assist employers in developing a framework of competencies and leverage benefit design to support population health. According to Dr. Bernacki, in his former role at Pepsico overseeing workforce management clinics, as well as the Executive Director for the Dell Medical School Healthcare Solutions, screening and disease management programs should be robust. Tackling it from a slightly different perspective and her role working with employed physicians providing care to more than one-hundred sixty thousand lives, Sara stated that there is a need for employers to share more data with employees in efforts to improve the individual level of engagement. Lastly, in Nancy’s work with the National Instrument’s onsite health clinic and benefit design, she sees a need for improved access to behavioral healthcare.

With the subject of employee engagement having been broached, Ed asked the panelists how employers can aid in providing access to health information to help decrease healthcare expenditures. Per Dr. Bernacki, he believes that price comparison tools offer an effective means of promoting cost consciousness for those utilizing health services. According to Sara, employers need to continue exercising transparency regarding the cost of care. For Nancy, biometric screenings, wellness programs and telehealth also offer opportunities to lower healthcare cost.

As an adjunct to the topic of wellness, Ed then inquired about the challenges that each organization experiences when trying to implement a company wellness program for employees. For Dr. Bernacki, inner city or on-site workforce management clinics used to treat episodic medical problems are an excellent means of identifying those individuals lacking primary care. While wellness is a new space for the Seton Health Alliance, Sara is finding that it varies by employer. According to Nancy, National Instruments has been on the forefront of the wellness space, having implemented an onsite health clinic which is directly managed by the Cooper Aerobics Clinic. In addition, NI promotes online wellness competitions, running groups and utilization of smart phone apps to capture health data.

As noted by Ed, foundational to managing employee wellness is identifying those most at risk and steering them to appropriate resources. Taking it a step further, Ed asked the group what they would recommend as strategies to encourage employees to complete health risk assessments. According to Dr. Bernacki, biometric screenings and onsite clinics represent feasible strategies. Per Sara, health screening assessments and depression screening tools provide substantial information. The development of a new service, Seton Primary Care at Home, also offers the ability to further support steerage to the appropriate resources. In addition, education regarding urgent care versus emergency room services is proving useful for all populations. Lastly, Nancy mentioned that NI no longer employs health screening assessments, as they have found biometric screenings to provide more useful information.

On a final note, Ed queried the panel about the current status of partnerships between the health systems and employer groups in the community for stimulating population health management. Per Dr. Bernacki, the Dell Medical School is creating clinics focused on musculoskeletal and women's health issues. In addition, they are approaching workers comp in a value based arena by developing onsite clinics with local employers and a near site clinic for University of Texas employees. According to Sara, the Seton Health Alliance has contracted with the City of Austin for Seton telehealth services. While each represent important steps forward, data gaps and integration with post acute services still represent challenges.

The Central Texas ACHE and National Forum for Latino Healthcare Executives chapters would like to thank the presenters for sharing their insights and best practices regarding healthcare transformation. For more information on future events, please visit us at www.centraltexas.ache.org or send us an email at info@centraltexasache.org.