



EXCELLENCE AT A SMALL COMPANY

Rhode Island Primary Care Physicians Corp.

Looking to improve care across all platforms

BY MIKE MUELLER
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Providing quality medical treatment in a rapidly changing health care industry can be difficult. But one Rhode Island business is helping to put many of the state's primary care physicians on the right path.

Rhode Island Primary Care Physicians Corp. in Cranston is an independent practice association of 130 primary care physicians. It works with these doctors' offices on everything from training employees to solving technological problems and contracting with insurers to help physicians deliver quality health care to more than 190,000 Rhode Islanders.

And recently, RIPCCP has teamed up with Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island and Care New England to produce Win4RI. This initiative has all parties working together to design new care models that weed out system redundancy and put the dollars saved back into programming that better meet the needs of the shared populations.

"One of the most important things lacking in health care is efficient coordination of care among all providers," said Noah Benedict, chief operating officer of RIPCCP. "It's unprecedented to have companies like Blue Cross, Care New England and RIPCCP in a conference room together, all working toward the same goal – improving the health of Rhode Islanders."

RIPCCP has grown significantly since it first launched in 1994. Its performance is based on clinical program success and the improved outcomes of its physician members' patients. RIPCCP does this by first implementing quality-driven care delivery models, then creating systems that better manage patients and – finally – measuring these outcomes.

For the past four years, its primary focus was implementing the National Committee for Quality Assurance's Patient-Centered Medical Home, a health

care model that aims to embody the principles of comprehensive and coordinated care, patient-centered health, accessible services, and quality and safety. RIPCCP has implemented PCMHs at more than 50 different practices over the last four years, more than any other organization in the state.

"I would say that's the major reason as to why we have advanced," said RIPCCP CEO Dr. Albert Puerini. "We just do a better job, and when you do a better job, people take notice."

Under this model, RIPCCP has grown staff from seven to 36 employees.

The group has tremendous buy-in from its physicians. A majority of the members participate in monthly physician group meetings that include professional development, status of the independent practice association's performance, and a dialogue between all the physicians that fall under the RIPCCP umbrella.

"They are committed and truly vested in the organization's success," said Benedict.

With its physicians and staff fully onboard, RIPCCP is looking to advance the company even further by becoming a connector within the health care community, "to open the lines of communication with the health care systems we interact with – the hospital facilities we utilize and the specialists that we refer our patients to," said Benedict.

Building upon these relationships has led to formal partnerships with one of Rhode Island's largest health care systems, Care New England. Together, the two organizations formed an Accountable Care Organization named Integra. It focuses on population-health management and provides patients with the proper resources to manage their health. For instance, an online health website for patients includes support groups, a symptom checker, a medication-checking system and resources on what people should know before surgery.

UnitedHealthcare of New England also joined forces with RIPCCP to launch two ACO agreements this year. The agreements focus on implementing innovative care-delivery models, development of resources for patient education and quality improvement.

RIPCCP also teamed up with United and Intel to battle what it believes is its biggest challenge – patient engagement. The collaboration created the Time for Wellness program, designed to help individuals develop healthier habits by providing clinical support and getting them invested in the data about their own health. Two hundred participants utilize

a fitness monitor that tracks everything from the amount of steps they take in a day to their sleep patterns. The patients then meet regularly with a physician to give guidance on nutrition and devise other strategies that can help improve their health.

The data collected shows a need for RIPCCP to differentiate its outreach approach to patients. Technology such as fitness monitors can work for some but not others, such as older patients and people suffering from chronic illnesses. These demographics may need a more intensive follow-up approach, such as personal phone calls and/or office visits. RIPCCP equips doctors to deal with these different kinds of approaches to

health care.

"What we are trying to do is for people like me – who let it go in one ear and out the other – is to do an analysis on data sets of our patients to help us better understand what will motivate them," said Puerini.

Although the company continues to make financial gains, RIPCCP recognizes the importance of giving back to the community in Rhode Island. This past June, the company hosted a fundraiser for Camp Surefire – the state's only camp for diabetic children – in Bristol. The organization's Cocktails for a Cause event raised \$7,000 in donations for the camp. ■

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NOAH BENEDICT

Rhode Island Primary Care
Physician Corp.
chief operating officer

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ENGAGED AND ENGAGING: Dr. Richard DelSesto, a physician associated with the Rhode Island Primary Care Physician Corp., speaks with a patient in his East Greenwich office.