

Seattle Clinic Receives National Recognition for Care of Diabetes Patients

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The Polyclinic and 12 Polyclinic Physicians Provide Patients With Coordinated Care

SEATTLE, Dec. 4 /PRNewswire/ -- Nearly 3 years ago, King County Executive Ron Sims set out to control the quickly rising cost of health care -- and his efforts are starting to pay off.

The Polyclinic, a large multi-specialty group in Seattle, was already prioritizing quality and efficiency in managing chronic disease when Sims began his quest. Encouraged by Sims' efforts through the Puget Sound Health Alliance -- and the promise that health plan incentives would align with taking better care of people -- the clinic doubled its efforts to build a system to provide comprehensive, coordinated care for patients with diabetes.

In late November, 12 Polyclinic physicians -- and the clinic as a whole -- earned recognition from the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) and the American Diabetes Association (ADA)¹ for delivering outstanding care to patients with diabetes. Widely considered the gold standard in diabetes care, the Diabetes Physician Recognition Program recognizes physicians who more intensively measure diabetes patients' blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels, as well as track annual retinal eye exams and regular foot exams.

The Polyclinic's chronic disease management program focuses on a highly-functional, coordinated system of delivering health care, and an informed, activated patient.

"Coordination of evidence-based care makes a big difference for patients faced with chronic diseases such as diabetes," said Michael Tronolone, MD, MMM, medical director of The Polyclinic. "We honed our systems, so that all providers caring for a diabetes patient had the necessary information and support at the point of care to deliver all the right care at the right time to each patient."

The result? After one year, The Polyclinic's widespread intensification of the diabetes management program showed improvement in the form of hard numbers. Diabetes patients were getting more regular retinal eye exams, foot inspections and 3-month check-up appointments -- all of which are necessary in avoiding the more serious health complications common among the diabetic population.

Today, the health of Polyclinic patients with diabetes continues to improve. Compared to national best practice standards, test scores for Polyclinic diabetic patients rank in the 90th percentile in important measures such as an LDL cholesterol level of less than 100, blood pressure less than 130/80 and an HbA1c scores of less than 7.²

¹ In Nov. 2006, Polyclinic Physicians were granted 3 year recognition by the NCQA/ADA Diabetes Physician Recognition Program.

² According to The Polyclinic Disease Management Quarterly Outcome Data 3rd Quarter 2006.

Just as important as the implementation of a chronic care model, is teaching diabetes patients how to manage their disease at home -- which is why The Polyclinic also employs a full-time certified diabetes educator.

"There are a lot of things that you can do to be healthier if you have the right tools," said Joel Hutchins, a 55-year old Tacoma resident who was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes almost 2 years ago. He began seeing the nurse educator at The Polyclinic, and through monitoring his diet and blood sugar levels, Hutchins has been able to lower his A1c count by 22 percent.

"The Polyclinic has a great team effort going -- and I was thrilled with the outcome," said Hutchins.

Better health care lowers costs

A 2003 study by the American Diabetes Association showed that care of diabetes patients in the U.S. cost \$132 billion in 2002 -- and per capita direct medical expenditures for the 12.1 million people diagnosed with diabetes was more than double the expenditures of otherwise similar people without diabetes.

Research also shows that patients with diabetes who maintain better control of their disease cost less to treat over the long run, primarily because they have fewer hospitalizations, surgeries, and emergency room visits. Given that diabetes is the single most costly chronic illness, the savings can add up fast.

Regional studies have shown that 41 percent of the time, health care services delivered are not consistent with recommended standards for quality care that improves health.

"All too often, there are substantial gaps between what clinicians know works and the care actually provided," said Tronolone.

This scenario ultimately results in more serious medical problems and higher health care costs for the entire community. For this reason and others, in 2003, Ron Sims formed the Puget Sound Health Alliance, a regional partnership involving employers, physicians, hospitals, patients, and health plans working together to improve quality, efficiency and health care costs. The Alliance chose diabetes as one of its first priority areas.

"The personal and economic costs of diabetes are significant, especially if not managed correctly," said King County Executive Ron Sims. "The Polyclinic's program builds on what works and encourages people to actively and effectively manage their disease."

"More intensive work in the doctor's office empowers patients, keeps them healthier and saves money," said Lloyd David, executive director of The Polyclinic. "Increasing quality can actually save money. It's very gratifying."

About The Polyclinic

The Polyclinic is made up of over 100 physicians, including internal medicine, family practice, OB/GYN, pediatrics, and 22 additional medical and surgical specialties. Since its inception in 1917, The Polyclinic's mission has been to promote the health of its patients through high quality, comprehensive and personalized care. For more information, visit www.polyclinic.com.