

# Cultivating Collaboration

Advanced Practice Providers play integral role in team-based care

**A**s we consider the future direction of healthcare, explanations of when and how we transition from a traditional fee-for-service reimbursement model toward value-based reimbursement models are filled with uncertainty and some vagueness. Two things, however, are without ambiguity. First, we will continue to undergo significant changes in the way we deliver health care with patient-centricity and more attention to population wellness, replacing more physician-centric and episodic dominant delivery systems. Second, we will proceed on our journey knowing we will deliver the best care in an ever increasingly demanding workload environment, and will do so in light of a shortage of primary care and some specialty physicians. As the increasing demand for services challenges overburdened physicians, one important group has been emerging as an effective solution for the healthcare delivery team: Advanced Practice Providers (APPs).

## Team-based care

Kettering Physician Network has been adapting a staffing model that includes increasingly independent APPs. Through models such as Patient-Centered Medical Homes and Comprehensive Primary Care Initiatives, we have been combining both physicians and APPs with other healthcare providers, including care managers and care navigators.

**Advanced Practice Providers (APPs) have master's or doctoral degrees and have undergone specialized education, training, certification, and licensure to provide healthcare-related services with varying degrees of independence.**

They include:

**Physician Assistant (PA-C)**

**Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN), which include:**

- Certified Nurse Practitioner (CNP)
- Certified Nurse Specialist (CNS)
- Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA)
- Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM)

The resulting team provides high-value healthcare where each member of the team is operating at the top of his or her license. Far from being just a safety valve for physicians, APPs are able to produce high-quality results as they provide services including annual examinations, acute care visits, maintenance care of chronic diseases, and wellness promotion. As state regulations relax and recognize the data-proven value of APPs, and with “managing up” by other members of the care team, patients accept and appreciate the value of the APP and the continuity of care.

## Access and growth

At Kettering Physician Network, we have seen the number of employed APPs increase from 40 at the end of 2013 to more than 100 at the present time. Given the range of services an APP can provide, this represents unprecedented access opportunities for our patients. Because APPs typically are more readily recruited and take less time to train than a physician, a practice can add an APP sooner than a new physician, which decreases patient backlog and demand for services. They help a practice extend practice hours and the number of appointment slots that are available.

Operating within their scope of practice and with appropriate collaboration and referrals to other physicians, APPs provide timely, high-quality patient-centered care. In the most ideal models of team-based care, the collaborating physician is no longer the bottleneck. There is improved practice efficiency and throughput, which helps enhance patient satisfaction without compromise of patient safety and quality.

## Healthier communities

As healthcare moves toward population health, we are being asked, “What are we doing to improve the overall health of our communities?” There is increasing demand on practitioners to meet the “triple aim” of medicine that includes providing patients with high quality care at reduced cost and

with good patient satisfaction. Patients and policy-makers are increasingly seeking value, which they partially define as increasing health and wellness so more expensive services are reserved for those who fail preventive measures.

APPs are vital to meeting the increasing workload imposed by these wellness initiatives and preventive measures. A patient who feels the caring and trust of a dedicated team of professionals develops a therapeutic relationship that is not solely dependent on one physician. That therapeutic alliance is effective—even when the physician is not available. With deliberate and caring communication with the patient, there is a greater likelihood of achieving incremental and frequent small outcome improvements needed to promote overall patient health and wellness.

Team-based care, incorporating effective intentional use of APPs, helps bridge the gap between society's expectations for primary care and diminishing resources. As a provider solely responsible to bridge that gap, burnout and feelings of inadequacy will continue. To achieve the quadruple aim, which includes improving the work-life balance of those providing the care, a team-based approach offers some meaningful protection.

The team-based care approach is an effective strategy, beneficial to both patients and to practices. By employing multiple team members who contribute at the top of their licenses to form meaningful therapeutic alliances, patients enjoy better health and wellness while team members are more likely to achieve greater outcomes and find better work-life balance.



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