Simple Strategies to Address and Resolve Gaps in Care

Why it is Important

It is important for hospitals to implement interventions to resolve differences in patient outcomes. This includes developing and pilot testing interventions to address identified disparities, as well as educating staff about gaps in care.

Create a multidisciplinary team to pilot an intervention based on patterns discovered at your organization. Teams could include data analysts, nurses, care managers and patient navigators.

A practical example would include a hospital identifying a disparity in readmission rates between patients with limited English proficiency compared to their English-speaking counterparts. An intervention could be to pilot test the mandatory use of in-person interpreters at discharge for patients with limited English proficiency and monitor readmissions for decreased rates.

Review A Roadmap to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care for more information.

Basic/Intermediate:

Test a change on a small scale. Learn from each test and refine the process. Cyclical improvement ensures that disparities are not worsening and that efforts are constantly being evaluated. Routinely monitoring data and improving processes can help break goals into manageable pieces, ensure accountability, and address feasibility challenges before they compromise the intervention.

Pilot test the intervention. This helps to identify elements of the intervention that will work and other elements that need to be adjusted.

Evaluate the process, outcome and intervention measures to demonstrate effectiveness. Adjust as needed to ensure equitable patient outcomes across different patient population groups.

Action Items:
- Use HQI's PDSA Worksheet to start the pilot testing discussion.
- Identify and meet with key team members. Consider using HQI's Priority Matrix to determine what activity is most important.
- Review CMS' Building an Organizational Response to Health Equity. The last page lists great resources to help guide the discussion.

Advanced:

Plan for sustainability from the start. Reducing disparities is a process for incorporating equity into a healthcare organization.

Sustainability-related efforts provide multiple levels of support to the intervention, so that in the event of organizational changes, providers and patients can remain on-track to reach their equity goals.

A core aspect of sustainability is the ability to adapt a program to changing circumstances. A **flexible and dynamic approach** to equity will help address changing circumstances quickly and effectively.

Another key component to sustainability is **financial sustainability**. Recent payment models create financial incentives to invest in the health of a population and focus on healthcare value rather than volume. Under these models, reducing disparities could improve an organization's bottom line.

Action Items:
- Consider using HQI's Sustainability Decision Guide to evaluate if an intervention is sustainable for an organization.
- Review chapter 5 (pages 42-45) of Massachusetts General Hospital's guide for inspiration on how other hospitals are addressing disparities.

HQIN
Health Quality Innovation Network