

## TEAM

National Jewish Health (NJH) is an academic research organization located in Denver, Colorado. In April 2016, NJH opened the Comprehensive Respiratory Care Clinic (CRCC) in a dedicated space within the pulmonary clinic at the main campus. The CRCC team serves adults with lung disease who are homeless, underinsured, or working poor by providing navigation, support services, and specialty lung health care. The team is dedicated to caring for the underserved, and to coordinating and integrating specialty respiratory and primary care to ensure smooth transitions in care.

## SITUATION

The health needs of the homeless are complex and compounded by social, cultural, and financial barriers. The need for the CRCC was realized through an environmental scan completed in 2015, which was performed to understand the issues, barriers, preferred and recommended practices, and the wants and needs of safety net clinics. The interdisciplinary care providers at the CRCC were excited about the opportunity to improve accessibility and coordination of care for underserved populations.

## ACTIONS

The CRCC Team was keenly aware that teamwork would be the key ingredient to their success. Prior to opening the clinic, the team participated in a week-long training to orient them to the needs of the homeless population, including training on cultural competency, smoking cessation, and available financial and transportation services to assist patients. Role-play exercises were used to work on clinic flow and getting to know one another's roles, to practice inhaler technique and instruction, and to practice the provision of patient education and patient activation.

Co-location of CRCC team members in the clinic is essential for coordination of care and communication. CRCC patients are seen by a pulmonologist for the first one or two visits. Once the patient is stabilized and the diagnostic workup is completed and interpreted, patients are followed by the CRCC Nurse Practitioner. The role of Patient Navigator includes scheduling patients, coordinating follow-up visits and diagnostic testing, providing reminder calls, arranging transportation, opening and closing patient visits, assessing and reviewing inhaler techniques, and making follow-up calls. The CRCC Team works with each patient to design a care plan that is realistic and tailored to the individual.

A goal for the CRCC is to ensure timely, seamless care between primary and specialty care. Their communication practices serve as the primary tool for reaching that goal. The CRCC Team faxes a one-page Quick Summary Note (QSN) to the referring provider the day the patient is seen. The QSN includes standard consultation notes between NJH physicians to referring providers (e.g., planned diagnostics, new medications, the rationale for new medications, the need to update vaccines, and directions for follow-up care for primary and specialist team providers).

Attending quarterly meetings with partnering primary care clinics also is an important part of providing seamless care. For instance, it was discovered that Stout Street clinic patients who were seen at NJH were unable to fill their prescriptions at the Stout Street pharmacy. By working together, the CRCC team and the clinic's staff designed a process to enable patients to receive their pulmonary medication within 24-48 hours of their NJH visit.

## IMPACT

By addressing the unique needs of underserved populations, the CRCC Team was able to decrease the no-show rate from 50% to 10% within the first six months of CRCC operation, exceeding their goal of no greater than 15% no-shows. For example, 13% of patients reported that transportation was a factor in missing their appointment. With the support of Patient Navigator services, 0% of patients now report transportation as a factor influencing their ability to make their appointment. Further, over 30% of patients who were dependent upon Patient Navigators for arranging transportation are now able to arrange their own transportation.

The CRCC Team is committed to helping patients develop self-care skills to assist with independence. For instance, there are a variety of inhalation devices and patients often have various inhalers for different medications. The CRCC Team ensures that patients have a firm understanding of how to correctly administer their medications. Patients are assessed pre- and post-visit on their ability to complete five steps: inhaler cap removal, device priming, exhaling, inhaling appropriately, and holding breath. The average pre-score is 3.16 (out of 5) and average post-score is 4.84. With the CRCC Team's support and commitment to patient education, CRCC patients have a better understanding of proper inhaler use to effectively manage their lung illnesses.

Other CRCC Team outcomes include:

- **Test Result Communication:** 100% of critical test results are communicated to the provider within 30 minutes.
- **Hand Hygiene:** Quarterly observations show that staff has a 97% compliance rate with hand hygiene protocols.
- **Medication Reconciliation:** 89% of adult CRCC patients, and 93% of pediatric patients, have their medication list reconciled during their visit. Over 95% of adult and pediatric CRCC patients have a medication list printed for them when they leave their appointment.
- **Vaccine Update Notification:** At each visit, the CRCC Team assesses the vaccine status of each patient. The referring primary care providers are notified 91% of the time about the need to vaccinate their patient. The CRCC Team is on their way to their target goal of 100% notification.

In terms of patient experience, 62% of CRCC patients complete an anonymous, voluntary, five-question survey after each visit. Overall, patients are highly satisfied with the CRCC Team, with an average overall rating of 4.6 out of 5. The other four items on the survey score highly as well, including Visit Date Available within a Reasonable Amount of Time (4.5), Wait Time during Visit (4.4), Amount of Time Spent with Clinic Staff (4.5), and Information Given about Medications, Illness and Follow-up (4.6).

Patients come to NJH from all over the world, seeking expertise and care for challenging chronic conditions. NJH patients undergo extensive testing and spend a significant amount of time with a variety of specialists to determine the right diagnosis. Once a diagnosis is clear, patients work with their care teams to develop a management plan that allows them to maximize their wellness. Unfortunately, this type of care experience is not often accessible to underserved patients—and this is where the CRCC Team excels. Access to appropriate specialty care helps keep underserved patients out of the hospital, reduces cost, and allows these patients to experience less disruption in their lives due to illness.