

WellStar Health System successfully transforms its emergency departments system-wide

WellStar Health System Marietta, GA

WellStar Health System, the largest health system in Georgia, is known nationally for its innovative care models, focused on improving quality and access to healthcare. Staying ahead of the curve in technology has enabled WellStar to be leaders in both the diagnosis and treatment of an extensive array of health conditions. Serving a diverse population, WellStar consistently looks at total patient wellness and works to ensure that all systems support that focus.

Challenge

After the merger of its existing 5 hospital system into an 11 hospital system, WellStar Health System determined that it needed a uniform, system-wide assessment tool. As expected, there were variations in work-flows and processes and policies that required standardization to ensure the same patient experience across all facilities. Because WellStar Health Systems' 10 emergency departments serve 682,000 patients each year – with the highest at-risk populations – their goal was for each individual to have the same quality of care, regardless of population or location.

Specific challenges included:

- Lab delays
- Wrong psych evaluation team (PET) consult orders
- Staffing issues
- Readmissions
- Unnecessary inpatient admissions for patients that could've been better served using outpatient services

Solution

- New behavioral health assessment tools were implemented that included suicide risk evaluations on every ED patient
- Best practices for standardized care processes were put in place for behavioral health patients
- On-staff psychiatrists were added to interview patients and remove 1013 status's when it was no longer required and it was determined that outpatient services would be more appropriate
- Processes were set up to flag patients that had frequent admissions in the past, with a goal to reduce the number of readmissions in the behavioral health unit to less than three per month

“By participating in Vizient’s Defining the Scope of ED Care: Appropriating Care for the Behavioral Health Patient, we were able to learn from others and share our challenges and successes. Additionally, having regional support from Vizient Southern States helped us stay focused on our project.”

Julia Bossie, MSN, RN, CEN, CNL
Clinical Nurse Practice Specialist
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Results

- Emergency department staff implemented clinical depression screenings at 9 facilities
- Collectively, WellStar hospitals made an improvement of 15 percent when compared to baseline data (for 3 months) over the performance period (1 year), which included reducing their left without being seen (LWBS) rates and emergency department behavioral health revisits by 7 days
- WellStar Cobb Hospital saw an estimated additional 121 patients in their emergency department over a 3-month period due to their improvements with reducing the number of LWBS patients
- This generated an estimated additional \$60,842 in revenue for that time period



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