

A large, stylized orange chevron pointing to the right, serving as a background for the text.

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Insight Driven Health

Patient Navigation Eases Clinical Workforce Challenges—Without Clinical Expertise

Lay patient navigation has been a cost-effective approach to help improve clinical care team productivity and patient outcomes, according to Highmark Foundation and Accenture data.

Lay patient navigators can help offset up to approximately 25 percent of case managers' non-clinical tasks, increasing efficiency allowing them to work at the top of their licenses. This Accenture analysis shows a role for lay patient navigators on a well-balanced healthcare team of doctors, nurses, case managers, health and care navigators, and community health workers among others.

Unlike nurses, case managers, or clinical patient navigators who are healthcare professionals skilled in clinical tasks, "lay patient navigators" are typically community members who are trained to help people manage non-clinical barriers—financial, logistical, emotional, cultural and communications—that can lead patients to deviate from their care plan. As one patient explains, "Talking to you has lifted the pressure off me and put everything in perspective."



Lifeline for patients, outcomes for all

Accenture worked with the Highmark Foundation to develop lay patient navigation pilot programs in three Western Pennsylvania hospitals, targeting priority areas and patient populations based on health needs of the communities.

Results of data collection from these pilots from July 2013 to March 2014 show that lay patient navigators can impact health outcomes and bottom line performance in priority areas that are significant business challenges for many hospitals. The data showed:

43% ↓

43 percent reduction in non-emergent emergency department use among frequent users. Overuse of the emergency department reduces hospitals' ability to address true emergencies.

13% ↑

13 percent increase in screening colonoscopy volume. Early diagnosis of colon cancer saves lives and lowers patients' and hospitals' overall cost of care.

60% ↓

60 percent reduction in 30-day readmissions across target diagnosis-related groups.¹ Financial penalties for excessive readmissions are expected to grow in the coming years.

The programs' cross-cutting focus and the positive results reinforce that while lay patient navigation had its roots in cancer care two decades ago, the benefits are generalizable across diagnoses, rather than being solely disease specific.

So clinicians can do what they do best

The use of task shifting to integrate lay patient navigators into clinical care teams was a key contributor to general improvements in productivity and patient care in Pennsylvania.

The lay navigators took on important but non-clinical tasks—such as picking up prescriptions from hospital pharmacies, arranging for transportation, connecting patients to community resources or conducting post-discharge follow-ups among others. As a result, tasks related to patients' care and recovery were accomplished, but without cutting into clinicians' time and focus. It was about rebalancing how teams were working so that clinically skilled staff could focus on those tasks that required their expertise.

It was important that everyone on the care team understood his or her role and responsibilities. For example, if issues arose outside of their training, lay patient navigators referred patients to the appropriate clinical team members. "Patient navigators made routine follow-up calls, but when a patient's questions were more than routine, the navigators escalated to the clinical team. Patients were constantly kept at the center of decisions, and the navigators ensured that any gaps in care coordination were closed," confirms Lori Shotts, RN, high risk care team supervisor, who participated in one of the pilot programs.

A new future for healthcare delivery

The use of lay patient navigation to help streamline how clinical care teams work offers numerous benefits such as—reducing the burden of overwork, improving patient adherence and experience, creating cost savings and improving health outcomes.

What's more, this cost-effective approach to better optimize clinical productivity could change the future of healthcare delivery. Consider the very real problem of the global healthcare worker shortage. The World Health Organization projects a shortage of 12.9 million healthcare workers by 2035—with an existing deficit of 7.2 million today.²

Engaging lay patient navigators provides options or alternatives to bridge the gap. "We have a responsibility to use finite clinical resources wisely to deliver quality healthcare no matter people's circumstances. This is the essence of patient navigation," says Dr. Harold Freeman, patient navigation pioneer and CEO of the Harold P. Freeman Patient Navigation Institute, which worked with Accenture and the Highmark Foundation to train the navigators used in this program.

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- Dr. Harold Freeman

¹ Lay patient navigation played a key role here as part of a broader set of activities.

² World Health Organization, "Global health workforce shortage to reach 12.9 million in coming decade," November 11, 2013, accessed June 21, 2014 <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2013/health-workforce-shortage/en/>

Harnessing the energy of the community

Augmenting the global clinical workforce with lay patient navigators impacts local workforces too by creating quality jobs for people in the dynamic healthcare sector.

"With this program, we recognized the opportunity to improve and assure timely access to quality healthcare while improving health outcomes in the communities we serve," says Yvonne Cook, president of the Highmark Foundation. "We look forward to patient navigation programs working successfully in other communities."

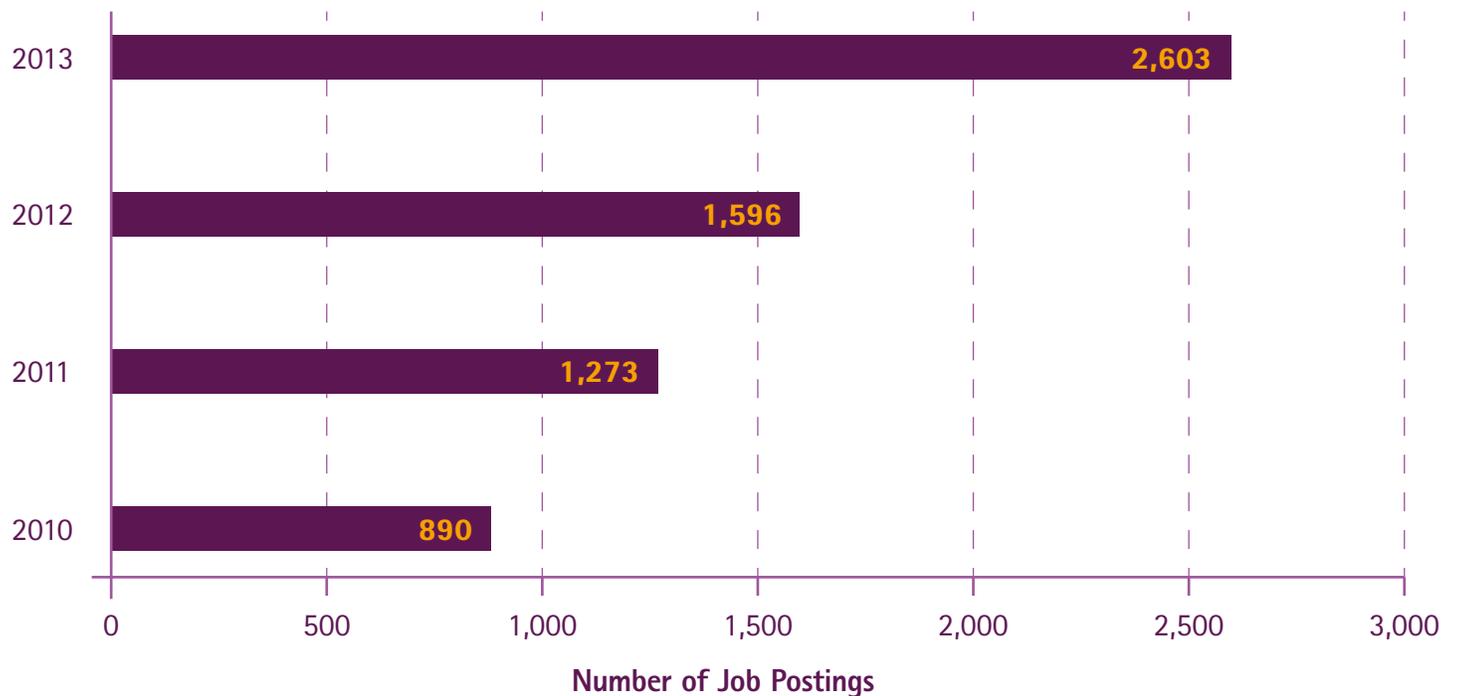
Experience shows that the most effective lay navigators are those that typically live and work in the communities as patients. When patients and navigators share experiences, cultures, languages and values, navigators are better positioned to help lessen patients' distrust in the healthcare system. Moreover, local lay patient navigators can draw on their relationships with and knowledge of the provider system and community-based resources to connect patients quickly to an ecosystem of care and support.

A healthcare role like any other

Patient care goes beyond tangible clinical or administrative tasks. It's also about the intangibles—empathy when people need it most and direction when they feel lost in the healthcare system. The addition of lay patient navigators to clinical care teams allows health workers to treat the whole person by reducing barriers to care. That's a win-win-win for caregivers, hospitals and patients in productivity, bottom-line performance and health outcomes.

The Harold P. Freeman Patient Navigation Institute (PNI) is Accenture's U.S. Corporate Citizenship "Skills to Succeed" partner. Through this relationship, Accenture provides pro-bono support via a core team helping PNI to equip more people with the skills to become patient navigators. Accenture U.S. Corporate Giving is also providing \$400,000 in training scholarships for 2011-2015. In addition, the Accenture Foundation has granted \$750,000 to PNI to help the organization roll out a patient navigator selection, skills-building and job readiness program in 35 locations across the United States.

Patient Navigation Job Demand: 2010 - 2013



Burning Glass Technologies: Numbers represent patient navigator job postings in the healthcare and social services sectors.

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About the Highmark Foundation

The Highmark Foundation is a private, charitable organization of Highmark, Inc. that supports initiatives and programs aimed at improving community health. The Foundation's mission is to improve the health, well-being and quality of life for individuals who reside in the communities served by Highmark, Inc. The Foundation strives to support evidence-based programs that impact multiple counties and work collaboratively to leverage funding to achieve replicable models. For more information, visit www.highmarkfoundation.org.

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