

Health and Wellness Not Just Buzzwords at Providence Health Plans

By Jennifer Schoonard
*Senior Marketing Specialist
Providence Health Plans*



Health care companies are good at crafting wellness slogans, but the real challenge is walking the talk. Providence Health Plans believes in providing people with the tools to improve their overall health – and its care management team is leading the way in this effort.

Health and wellness aren't simply buzzwords at Providence Health Plans – not for the registered nurses who make up the Providence Care Management team. They minister to people with chronic conditions or acute illnesses and help many of them find new ways to manage their health. In 2010,

the team worked with 30,577 individuals experiencing more than 20 types of chronic conditions ranging from asthma and diabetes to congestive heart failure. The goal of care management is to educate and empower people to take charge of their own health by recognizing symptoms that need treatment, asking questions, advocating for themselves with their providers and, in general, improving their quality of life.

The New England Journal of Medicine in 2008 reported that 70 percent of health care costs are incurred by just 10 percent of patients. Patients who languish with disease are more susceptible to emergency department visits and hospitalization, which drive up health care costs exponentially. Providence Care Management nurses help people better manage their symptoms, which translates into fewer trips to the emergency room or stays in the hospital. As a health care organization, Providence's responsibility is twofold: to help people stay healthy, and also, to be accountable to its paying customers in terms of how their health care dollars are spent.

“When the public thinks of help-

ing people stay healthy, they don't necessarily think of an insurance company, but that is the goal of care management at Providence,” said Karen Miles, R.N., a manager on the care management team. “People can gain control of their chronic conditions through our nurse care manager outreach.”

Here's how the program works: Providence Health Plans uses data from hospital discharge reports or claims to identify people who have a chronic condition or acute health issue. The member receives a phone call from a registered nurse case manager who invites them to participate in the program. People who choose to participate complete a comprehensive health assessment with the nurse via telephone. The registered nurse and the member develop a plan that addresses key health and wellness goals; for example, committing to take medication daily, exercising or making dietary changes. The program is available to all Providence Health Plans subscribers at no cost.

“Making a phone call that is personalized for the member helps people know there's someone who cares,” said Deborah Ben-

jamin, R.N., also a manager on the care management team. “We keep in contact with you until you are comfortable managing your health.” Benjamin explained that nurses have worked with chronically and terminally ill individuals, sometimes for years, seeing them through to the end of their lives.

For the past eight years, the program has been administered by registered nurses who work directly for Providence Health Plans, with significant measurable outcomes. The program received an award for excellence in disease management outcomes in 2010 for achieving the greatest reduction in coronary artery disease, or CAD, events in the Disease Management Purchasing Consortium’s national database. The program also received awards from the consortium in 2010-2011 for:

- Recognition of commitment to and achievement of valid-

ly measured outcomes in the common chronic condition programs categories of asthma; CAD; congestive heart failure, or CHF; chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD; and diabetes;

- Recognition as one of the top performers in achieving a valid return on investment in disease management programs; and
- Achieving the lowest adverse medical event rate in the consortium’s national database for disease management programs.

Those awards are tied directly to the health improvements logged with each interaction. But perhaps most important is members’ experience with the program. Providence scores high in member satisfaction, with rates ranging from 96.6 percent to 98.5 percent for members with COPD,

diabetes, CHF and CAD.

“We are continually evaluating our program offerings and coaching programs,” said Susan Abate, director of Providence Health Plans’ Quality Medical Management department, of which Providence Care Management is part. “By listening to our members and ensuring we have the tools and information they need, we can help improve their health and quality of life.”

Jennifer Schoonard is a senior marketing specialist with the marketing and communications department for Providence Health & Services, where she focuses on health and wellness communications for members. She has been a writer and editor for 15 years, working at newspapers and social change agencies, and in the past several years, with health insurance organizations. She can be reached at jennifer.schoonard@providence.org.

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