Patient Navigation: A Value-Added Student Role

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Innovation Identified

Patient navigation is a nine-month experience in which students are immersed in a clinical site or program. The student navigators guide patients through the complex health continuum, assist in implementing a new initiative or serve as an extension to the clinical staff. The student navigator will provide information, educate patients, offer emotional support and facilitate coordination of community care. The student navigators are currently embedded in 39 various site-types and programs, which include transitions programs, primary care clinics, specialty-based clinics, underserved free clinics and nursing homes.

Stakeholder Input

• “This is the only experience we have where we’re in a clinic as students in our careers when we are not focused on disease or diagnosis and we’re just focused on the patient. Thinking about that is somewhat profound” – First-year Medical Student

• “We may have prevented readmissions and medication side effects for patients. But the value is education for the student. It was a good experience for them regarding patient barriers to care and having a better understanding of being empathetic to the barriers patients face, and being able to know how to find resources and understand how to use team members to help the patient overcome barriers.” – Site Mentor

• “We are a fairly large health system but yet feel disconnected from the rest of the system. The program provided some needed connections that I as a manager need to help our patients—it’s breaking down those silos.” – Site Mentor

Resource Needed and Potential Barriers

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<th>Key Drivers (Priority Areas)</th>
<th>Interventions</th>
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<td>Educational/Value for Students</td>
<td>• Integrate students into interprofessional care teams and allow for interacting work and processes</td>
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<td>• Students aware of functionality within the team</td>
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<td>• Provide for opportunity for students to be active participants within the clinical site, have a high degree of continuity with patients</td>
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<td>• Develop proactive continuous quality improvement process between curriculum, students and mentors</td>
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Timeline Proposed

The proposed timeline to design and implement a patient navigator program is two years. Innovators will need one year to identify and meet with community stakeholders to brainstorm and organize the program, designate a senior site mentor and allocate time and capacity to sustain the program.

It is recommended to allot one year to pilot the program at each clinical site-type. Innovators will use the pilot year to gather feedback from students and community stakeholders, implement changes within each program and continually educate community stakeholders on the program expectations and goals.

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Photo courtesy of The Washington Post

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