



Leadership Success in Integrated Care Settings

A successful integrated care program requires careful attention to leadership which supports the planning, implementation, and ongoing success of the program. Integrated care is a new approach to healthcare for many and is a paradigm shift that requires real change in the way healthcare is delivered. Practicing this approach shifts historical and entrenched provider silos and how staff have been trained and funded to provide behavioral health care. Integrated care must address the change needed to shift habits and behaviors and encourage the team to stretch beyond the traditional boundaries of simply referring to specialty behavioral healthcare, practicing in a traditional therapy environment, and providing care in the fast-paced primary care setting.

Consequences of Insufficient Leadership

Leaders must have a good knowledge of the profound culture shift that occurs with integrated care since every level of the organization will be affected and require “practice change.” If this challenge is ignored, significant consequences could occur including the following.

- Reduced participation of providers leading to low volume of referrals.
- Lack of clarity about patient care objectives.
- Low commitment to the quality of care.
- Limited support for the innovation.
- Increased stress for providers.

Effective Approaches to Change

Leaders will benefit from helping to establish both values and vision before implementation of an integrated care program.

- Values: identify core values underlying the vision for the model and identify ways that a leader can demonstrate these.
 - Be a role model for nonhierarchical problem solving, keep patients at the center of design and care decisions, and keep the focus on the population to receive integrated care.
 - Identify core principles that support the values such as how integrated care works for the entire organization (should not be viewed as a stand-alone program). For example, make sure board understands and embraces integrated care.
 - Use your leadership authority to reduce barriers that the teams encounter!
 - Build leadership infrastructure to support the transition by supporting other layers of leadership as they work to implement at the ground level.
 - Commit to effective care by developing clear and specific clinical, financial, and operational outcomes expected from integrating primary and behavioral patient care.

- Vision: leaders must be committed to a longer-term vision of an improved approach to healthcare by implementing integrated care.
 - Demonstrate a genuine understanding of the model and what is required to reach the goals and desired outcomes. Don't just leave this to the rest of the team.
 - Partner with providers on the front line and staff throughout the organization to find solutions together and to leverage the expertise at both clinical and operational levels.
 - Engage and leverage clinical and operational "champions" who understand and are enthusiastic about integrated care to assist in detailed implementation components that range from clinical to IT to revenue cycle to facility needs.
 - Define the target population for the integrated care effort. It is impossible and not practical to provide for all behavioral health needs for everyone in the integrated primary care setting so pick the most relevant population preferably using data (instead of just a best guess) about the best course.
 - If pediatric patients, then what diagnosis (depression? Anxiety? ADHD?) or age (12 and up? Younger?).
 - For an adult population what is most prevalent and treatable with integration of behavioral health in the primary care setting. Typically, this could be depression, anxiety, or substance use.
 - Plan for and set aside time to talk with the team implementing the model and not underestimate how valuable this is to success. Use this time to evaluate if the values and vision are being fulfilled.

Tips for How Good Leadership Can Promote Best Practices in Integrated Care

The lack of attention to planning for implementation by leadership has been a consistent barrier for effective integrated care implementation. In order to ensure strong implementation of integrated care, consider the following approaches.

1. Communicate early and often the importance of integrated care to everyone. Repeat it over and over in many ways (email, newsletter, etc.). Over communicate!
2. Invest in and commit to the work of culture change and investment in resources to do this.
3. Be present in the clinic, the setup of the program, and build trust with the team. Learn from the providers in the trenches.
4. Support changes in nonclinical operations too – medical records, documentation, revenue cycle, consent, scheduling, job descriptions, etc. will ALL require changes.
5. Write down workflows that are very detailed and clear descriptions of who will be doing what, when, and how.
6. Integrate productivity demands with an understanding of integrated care – it will be different in order to be successful and not just repeat traditional specialty behavioral health care standards.
7. Identify metrics that are realistic and attainable and include both process and outcome measures. Insure they are attainable and set new ones as old ones are achieved.
8. Focus on team development – don't forgo this as you get caught up in the clinical and optional processes or it will surprise you when you begin to have difficulties.
9. Pay attention to the physical space too. Successful integration requires close proximity of the behavioral health and primary care providers.
10. Inspire others. People follow leaders because they believe in the direction, solution, and values that a leader promotes. Maintain the focus, energy, and commitment as success is gained! Celebrated milestones and be patient with progress.