10 Benefits of Clinical Integration

by Marge Mercury, RN, MS, CMCE

Whether clinical integration is targeted to achieve greater coordination around a single clinical condition or procedure or fully integrating a healthcare provider network, the benefits are clear. There are a wide range of approaches and strategies to achieve successful clinical integration (“CI”), but regardless of the strategy, CI, when designed and implemented correctly, offers tremendous potential to create efficiencies and improve healthcare quality and patient satisfaction. Here are 10 benefits of CI to consider when exploring whether an organization should pursue it.

1. Increased Collaboration – The use of care teams to implement a CI program addresses gaps in the care continuum while reducing ineffective or unneeded process steps. This approach allows hospitals and healthcare providers to learn to operate as a team to better align, or realign, their efforts to improve quality, patient safety, and patient and family satisfaction.

2. Improved Efficiency – CI eliminates healthcare waste and redundancy, making it possible for hospital systems to provide patients focused seamless systems of care across and between healthcare providers.

3. Integrated Systems – CI programs provide hospital systems with many more monitoring and enforcement tools than through a typical medical staff organization, including the payment of financial incentives for physicians who actively participate in the program and penalties for those who do not.

4. Payer Partnerships – As CI improves the quality of patient care and clinical processes and reduces costs, hospitals are able to achieve market differentiation. This type of differentiation is attractive to health plans and can serve as the catalyst for payer partnerships.

5. Improved Care Management – Organizations that are successfully clinically integrated benefit from improved care management. Patients who see multiple doctors are well aware of the fragmented and redundant services and care they receive. Case management serves as the foundation to accomplish coordination of care across traditional health settings. Its goal is to achieve the best clinical and cost outcomes for both patient and provider and is most successful when case managers are able to work within and outside organized health systems.

6. Integrated Continuum of Care – At the heart of CI is teamwork among healthcare providers working to ensure patients get the right care at the right time in the right setting. CI care management teams collaborate with adult day care, independent living, assisted living, and skilled nursing facility partners. Together, with infrastructure focused on supporting caregivers and patients to efficiently assess, document, communicate, and meet patient needs enables hospital systems and healthcare networks to achieve this core objective.
7. Clinical Data Systems – An integrated technology (“IT”) platform that supports continuity of care and enables access to medical history and critical patient data for all stakeholders is imperative in CI, easing communications across the care continuum and providing information that measures service, performance, quality, and outcomes on an individual provider and network-wide basis.

8. Patient-centered Communication – In many networks, communication skills training is provided to physicians and healthcare providers with the goal of establishing clear channels of communication as a vital part of the CI program. The Joint Commission has cited communication breakdown as the single greatest contributing factor to sentinel events and delays in care in U.S. hospitals. The CI emphasis on timely and clear communication is key to influencing patient behavior, resulting in cost/quality benefits.

9. Improved Pharmaceutical Management – Most medication errors are not caused by individual carelessness, but rather by faulty processes that lead people to make mistakes or fail to prevent the mistakes. CI improves pharmaceutical management allowing hospitals to identify gaps in the medication management process and allow them to take actions to help make patients safer.

10. Improved Health of the Community – CI emphasizes wellness initiatives such as outreach programs and classes to empower the patient with tools, knowledge, and practical solutions to participate actively in their care, ultimately leading to a healthier population. Extensive research in the past three decades indicates that receiving wellness and prevention advice and care from trusted local hospitals and physicians resonates with individuals.

For more information on clinical integration, please contact Ms. Mercury at mmercury@thecamdengroup.com or 585.512.3906.