

Group Health Cooperative

Active Case Management and Interactive Chronic Care Guideline Software Significantly Reduce Readmit Rates

To improve healthcare with limited resources, healthcare executives are working to more efficiently deliver the best medical care possible. Some challenges include the needs of aging patients with complex or comorbid conditions, problems of working across urban and rural areas, general-practice nurses taking over specialist jobs as experienced case managers retire, and the struggle to effectively manage workflow and patient care with outdated computer systems or incomplete clinical guidelines.

One major healthcare system addressed all these problems with the help of *Milliman Care Guidelines*® products. Seattle-based Group Health Cooperative used the evidence-based *Chronic Care Guidelines* and software to help increase the efficiency and quality of healthcare delivery, and to provide case-management tools to help nurses address challenging patient needs.

Group Health Cooperative approach

Group Health expanded a comprehensive, complex case-management program, giving all its case manager nurses Web access to interactive, nationally recognized, evidence-based clinical guidelines.

This program enabled Group Health Cooperative to reduce readmit rates for its nearly 600,000 members. While concentrating on the 175,000 or so most challenging cases at first, the Cooperative now has all appropriate patients under this proven program.

Start of the Complex Case Management Program

Group Health Cooperative introduced a new case-management plan in 2008, led by Barbara (Barbie) Wood, RN, BSN, MBA, Director, Complex Care Management.

The original Group Health case-management model was developed in rural northern and eastern Washington

and northern Idaho, with smaller healthcare facilities serving relatively few, widely scattered patients. While some case managers could handle those patients from a central office, planners decided that each urban primary-care facility needed its own trained case manager. Thus, the original nine-nurse Group Health case-management staff more than tripled in five months.

“We now have about 30 nurse case managers, and we’ll probably grow to 40 or 50,” Wood said. “We focused first on some of our sickest of patients. Starting with these challenging cases let us prove that this program would give us a real return on our investment.”

By using the nationally recognized, evidence-based *Milliman Care Guidelines* and the supporting Web-based *CareWebQI*® software, Group Health accommodated this quick growth by focusing training on the software itself. Once these skilled case manager nurses, already well-versed with the *Care Guidelines* content, were trained on the interactive software, then access to, and use of, the guidelines was simple. *Care Guidelines* content enabled case managers to quickly build a detailed care plan to manage each case.

“The comprehensive depth and breadth of the *Chronic Care Guidelines* is extraordinary,” Wood said. “They free our case managers to be nurses. We don’t have to worry about relying on our memories – *CareWebQI* assessment screens ask the necessary questions.

“This approach frees up the nurse to focus on important things – addressing the issues such as age, gender, cultural and personal differences that will most impact how well the patient progresses,” Wood said. “*CareWebQI* and the *Chronic Care Guidelines* let the nurses really listen to the patient’s unsaid questions, or confusions, or issues that will slow recovery or lead to readmit.

“These crucial clinical tools let a nurse pay attention to the patient, rather than a checklist. By being alert to possible patient misunderstanding, case managers can help to make the patient a responsible partner in his or her own healthcare,” she said.

The *Care Guidelines* also provide national standards for efficient and effective care delivery, so that all of Group Health’s complex patients now receive consistent, high-level case management assessment and coverage, regardless of where they are treated. Backed by these broadly accepted guidelines, the new case management nurses can help patients move through each step of the care continuum.

In searching for a way to support nurses thrown into the case management role, Group Health turned to the *Care Guidelines* to help deliver consistent, high-quality care to its members, using the best medical practices for the most effective standards of care.

Clinical guidelines and software make it simple

With Milliman’s *Chronic Care Guidelines* and *CareWebQI*, Wood could teach the software, not the assessments. Without the *CareWebQI* software, she would have to teach the basics of medical case management. But easy-to-use software, with the rich clinical content of the *Care Guidelines*, simplifies the case management training.

“A couple of hours is more than enough time to teach the basics,” Wood said. “Then the case managers just need to know the diagnosis, then pull up and follow the specific, optimal-care guideline for that diagnosis to ensure that all the care elements have been delivered.

“There is no need to teach case managers about each individual illness,” she said. “*CareWebQI* software makes it easy to point and click through assessments and care steps for each condition.”

Group Health long worked with a home-grown case management information system developed on an obsolete software platform and using static, stand-alone guidelines, some of which were 12-18 months old. Trying to keep them updated – assuming that updates were available – was a full-time job for one nurse, in

addition to total system maintenance costs. “The added value of the *Care Guidelines* is that we’re all using the same guidelines for all patients, and Milliman Care Guidelines does all the updating for us,” Wood said.

About Group Health Cooperative

Founded in 1947, Group Health Cooperative is a consumer-governed, nonprofit health care system based in Seattle. Group Health and its subsidiary health carriers, Group Health Options, Inc., and KPS Health Plans, serve more than 590,000 residents of Washington and northern Idaho. Nearly two-thirds of members receive care in Group Health-operated medical facilities. Today it is one of the few health care organizations in the country governed by consumers – a community coalition dedicated to making quality health care available and affordable. Group Health Permanente (GHP), an independent professional corporation formed by Group Health staff doctors, provides exclusive care in Group Health-operated facilities. In areas where Group Health doesn’t own facilities and for plans offering more choice, Group Health contracts with nearly 9,000 independent community clinicians and 41 additional hospitals to meet member health care needs. For more information, visit www.ghc.org.

For more information about Milliman Care Guidelines, visit www.careguidelines.com.