Care Transformation: Balancing Standardization and Personalization

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One of the more challenging developments in the healthcare industry today is the simultaneous push toward standardization and personalization. These trends can seem contradictory; however, given the evolving state of healthcare delivery, standardization and personalization are complementary approaches to the same goals: experience, affordability, efficiency and quality of care.

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The future of healthcare delivery is a confluence of evidence-based practices, patient preferences

and precision medicine, all enabled by data analytics and technology. To compete in the future, healthcare organizations must understand how they can standardize care delivery while embracing consumers' varied needs and preferences through personalization.

Standardization and Personalization Share the Spotlight

Standardization and the reduction of unwanted clinical variation are top of mind for most healthcare leaders. Standardization leads to more efficient, less costly care and a more consistent patient experience — outcomes that become critical as the industry accelerates the adoption of value- and risk-based models.

Personalization is what consumers have come to expect in everyday experiences across industries in person and online, and healthcare is no longer an exception. Healthcare providers are recognizing the value of personalization in activating and empowering patients in their care, which lowers costs, improves outcomes and builds loyalty.

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New entrants, such as Iora Health, which touts a laserlike focus on patient-centric, relationship-based care, continue to expand their network of primary care partners. Meanwhile, mainstay system Intermountain Healthcare offers genomics services designed to guide more customized treatments for patients, physicians and researchers in the field.

Ambulatory care leaders list process standardization as a top priority for how leaders plan to change care delivery to meet the expectations of patients, according to a Huron survey. Leaders also indicate that they are investing heavily in patient-centric technology, signaling that delivering personalized care and standardization carry equal weight in providing a consistent, high- value experience across the care continuum.

The challenge now is determining how to combine the efficiencies of standardization with the potential that personalization brings.

Paving the Way to More Personalized Care

Standardization paves the way for more personal interactions by establishing a baseline of high quality. Without that, organizations will struggle to advance personalization in care delivery and overall patient experience. Those that have the greatest success will ensure standardization and excellence in quality of care are inherent, occurring automatically as part of the organization's DNA. In a high-performing organization, the desired and predicated variation in care becomes highly personalized, anchored to a patient's preferences or needs.

To simultaneously advance standardization and personalization, healthcare leaders should consider the following:

Physician and patient engagement:
Proactively dispel concerns about "cookie-cutter" standardization in clinical care. Bring in a physician champion who can communicate how standardization gives back time and resources that

can be spent on one-to-one personalized patient care. When a provider can use their skills to empower patients, it enhances physician engagement, patient experiences and clinical outcomes.

Patient interactions and communication: Don't underestimate the power of good communication as an effective way to deliver personalized care. When patients feel like they are heard and communication with their provider is clear and easy, it improves their experience and makes them feel like a person, not a number. Consider patient communication training for clinical and non-clinical staff in addition to investments in tools that can support improved communication, such as customer relationship management (CRM) technology.

Data analytics: Data analytics will continue to bridge the gap between standardized and personalized care by informing process engineering, and care pathways and protocols. Using data analytics to understand where unwarranted variation is occurring should be the starting point of every improvement journey. As the industry gets better at using data analytics in decision making and automation finds more mainstream uses in operational, administrative and clinical settings, the potential for optimal standardization will accelerate.

Access to digital tools for patient information and data capture: From appointment scheduling to the point of care, evaluate whether providers and staff have access to the right information at the right time in the EHR (electronic health record) or in other tools. Being able to access a full menu of meaningful data, such as patient preferences and social risk factors, is critical to providing care that is tailored to an individual's needs. In cases where genomics and precision medicine could improve diagnosis and treatment, more integrated tools may be needed.

Accountability and alignment: Even with the best processes and technology in place, a lack of accountability and alignment will thwart improvement. Efforts to reduce unwanted variation cannot be a one-time effort. To truly transform how care is delivered, organizations must build an engine with an infrastructure that combines data analytics

support and technology with an organizationwide mindset focused on continuous improvement.

Sequencing: Don't get overwhelmed. Optimizing care delivery of core processes can drive significant impacts to quality and experience. This includes coordination of care and care management, consistency of experience in scheduling and access, and the establishment of evidence-based clinical protocols.

Personalization is not just a buzzword; it is the present and future of healthcare. But it cannot be done without a keen focus on standardizing the processes and behaviors that establish a foundation of excellent quality.

Key Takeaways

Positioning a healthcare organization for success in the future will require dual focus on standardization and personalization. To do so, leaders should:

Think differently.

Understand how standardization and personalization are not opposites but rather parallel, complementary goals that can improve efficiency, patient experience and quality of care.

Plan differently.

Use data analysis and digital tools to help reveal areas to improve both standardization and personalization.

Act differently.

Shift the organizational mindset to understand that standardization establishes a level of excellence that then enables more personalized care.

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