

Successful Outsourcing Relationships



Clinical outsourcing can be an important strategy for health providers, in particular those seeking to add specific clinical expertise or make improvements in certain areas to serve patients better.

So how does a hospital find a suitable clinical partner? An article, "Creating Outsourcing Relationships That Work", appearing in *HealthLeaders Magazine*, describes how Saint Agnes Hospital (Baltimore, MD) found an outsourcing partner with the right track record and experience to help revamp its emergency department. Within one year, the ED's admission times were down by two hours and its left-without-being-seen rate dropped from 5.4 to 1.7 percent, among other positive results.

The article also highlights the enduring relationship between Barnabas Health (West Orange, NJ) and its ED partner — an alliance that has continued for 20 years now. "Even though they [the vendor] are an outside partner, they are completely intertwined in the culture and the fabric of the organisation," says John Bonamo, MD, executive vice president and CMO, Barnabas Health.

Saint Agnes: Building an ED Powerhouse in Baltimore

Saint Agnes' emergency department was a high-volume unit, accounting for about 70 percent of admissions to the 276-bed teaching hospital. The health provider had outsourced its ED for two decades with varying degrees of success and two years ago a strategic plan called for bringing on a new national clinical partner to help overhaul the department amidst low patient satisfaction ratings and poor performance (eg, admission and discharge times were too high).

"The [new] partner we chose had the experience, the track record and they had a methodology for improving throughput and satisfaction," says Adrian Long, MD, CMO at Saint Agnes.

Working with its new ED partner, the hospital began a complete renovation of the ED, including realigning the physical plant as well as nursing and support staff. Most of the ED reconfiguration has been to accommodate a new triage programme — ie, patients are rapidly evaluated as soon as they enter the ED. "Lower-acuity patients are treated very quickly without putting them in an exam room space," Dr. Long says. This has allowed the hospital to focus more time on the acutely ill.

The changes in ED throughput have impacted everything from patient satisfaction scores to patient volumes. For example, CMO Long says Saint Agnes is on pace to see 90,000 patients per year through the ED, up 10 percent in one year since renovating and teaming up with the new vendor. Meanwhile, ambulance diversion rate has decreased sharply from 170 hours to 5 hours per year.

In addition to the ED, Saint Agnes also outsources food service, environmental services, and its facilities to a national contract through its parent, Ascension Health.

Given the current market trends, Dr. Long says it is important to find a partner who understands the organisation's strategic direction and can expand beyond its clinical focal areas.

Barnabas Health: Growing a Long-Term Partnership

The integrated delivery system also has outsourcing relationships in anaesthesiology and hospital medicine across its seven-hospital network.

CMO Bonamo attributes the success of the organisation's 20-year relationship with its ED partner to focusing on clinical results first. "The reason it's been such a good relationship is that we don't look at these relationships from a financial perspective. We look at them from a care-delivery and what's-the-best-patient-centric approach," he says. "They've really honed their skills. They hire only board-certified emergency room physicians, and they attract the very best emergency department physicians because of their reputation."

Barnabas Health has set a one-hour goal as the maximum time to move a patient out of the ED and admit him or her to a hospital room. With the help of its ED vendor, the organisation has reduced this time from four hours to 80 minutes.

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