Transforming Healthcare:
Optimizing Physician and Affiliate Provider Teams


The Woodruff Health Sciences Center’s (WHSC) strategic journey toward excellence is emerging through the successful integration of academic excellence with innovative approaches to patient care. As the healthcare industry continues to change rapidly, transformational change within care delivery models is required to meet demands created by the confluence of baby boomers, soaring costs, a lack of primary care providers, and rising physician burnout rates. Those organizations that achieve high patient, clinician and employee satisfaction while delivering high quality and efficient care are those that will flourish in the complex future of modern healthcare.

To achieve transformational change in healthcare delivery, Team Lifesavers proposes WHSC develop a cutting-edge model of physician and affiliate provider (nurse practitioner and physician assistant) teams that recognizes the distinct value and clinical expertise of all team members and leverages the team members’ skills to deliver high quality, efficient, patient-centered care. Nurse practitioners and physician assistants have been referred to in multiple ways including non-physician providers, mid-levels, and physician extenders, yet these terms define their value in reference to physicians rather than recognize their distinct expertise and contribution to the healthcare team as clinical partners. Developing a novel model of team based care will require important cultural transformation for both patients and clinicians.

Our team conducted an analysis of the current clinical and business practices of affiliate providers throughout Emory Healthcare including the emergency department, hospital medicine, critical care, orthopedic surgery, urology, general surgery, and vascular surgery. Additionally, we researched best practices within the literature and Georgia’s laws that define the nurse practitioners’ and physician assistants’ scopes of practice. We combined this quantitative analysis with interviews of clinicians and administrators and a survey using validated scales to assess EHC affiliate providers’ current job satisfaction.

We propose that WHSC systematically enhance current physician/affiliate provider teams in addition to expanding the use of affiliate providers. We see this transformation towards more effective team-based care as a way to improve patient access, provider and patient satisfaction, and the value of our healthcare delivery. Team-based care has the potential to increase efficiency in both inpatient and outpatient settings thus increasing the volume of patients seen while also decreasing wait times for patient appointments. Implementing a novel healthcare model that recognizes that distinct clinical expertise off all members and ensures that all team members practice to the top of their license has potential to increase the value and quality of our healthcare delivery as well.

In order to develop and implement a cutting edge model of affiliate provider and physician teams, we recommend the following action items:

- Transform culture to support team-based care delivery models
- Support new provider teams by creating and distributing a toolkit that provides hiring guidance, educational information on the expertise of affiliate providers, and team building tools
- Develop a ‘tiger’ team to analyze current physician/affiliate provider teams and to guide them in becoming more efficient and more cohesive
- Expand the amount of interprofessional training throughout the Woodruff Health Sciences Center
- Improve recruitment and retention of excellent nurse practitioners and physician assistants
The LifeSavers

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