The Can-Do Approach to Value-Based Care

No matter the size of your organization, the only way to grow is to deliver great care. Value-based care is the model of the future, and with more states receiving expansion grants to become CCBHCs, detailed reporting for compliance and reimbursement is more important than ever.

How do you maximize performance, leverage data, and provide quality, whole-person care? If anyone knows the answer, it's Kristen Daugherty, CEO of Emergence Health Network in El Paso, Texas. Emergence is El Paso's local developmental disability and mental health authority, also providing integrated care, crisis management and intervention in correctional facilities.

Recently, I did a webinar with Kristen, and I asked about her "can-do" approach to value-based care. It turns out that Emergence wasn't always the profitable community leader it is today. Kristen shared how she helped turn Emergence around and become extremely successful under the value-based care model. Want to learn more about her strategy? Read on to see how you can maximize funding and care outcomes.

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Strategic Planning and Priorities

When Kristen became CEO of Emergence over 10 years ago, there was so much work to do, it was almost overwhelming. "We had to figure out where to start," she recalled. "I think that's where most organizations struggle. There's so much you want to do."

First, Kristen and her team developed a strategic plan. They grouped their goals into three-year increments, and they started internally. Emergence lacked infrastructure, communications, outcome tracking and revenue diversification. Were they really delivering quality care? By putting metrics in place and holding themselves accountable, the team discovered where their problems were—and took the first step toward providing value-based care.

As their reputation grew, Emergence turned to forward-facing initiatives. Leveraging their new-found success, they positioned themselves as experts in the community—providing behavioral health resources and education. And they started diversifying their services for more revenue streams, which in turn increased their ability to deliver more expert-level education and care. As the saying goes, most people don't plan to fail; they fail to plan. To become a profitable organization in the value-based care landscape, Kristen and her team had to plan to succeed.

Where to Invest

When Kristen inherited a struggling organization, she had a decision to make. Should she run Emergence on a skeleton budget? Or should she take a risk and invest in the future. In Kristen's case, she had a strategy to guide her, and she needed the tools to provide top-quality care. So, Emergence invested millions of dollars in technology, including both hardware and software, with the support of their Board. Kristen and her team began to construct a very high functioning, productive digital infrastructure with an electronic health record (EHR) at its core. They added the servers, the laptops—and a technology partner.

Netsmart was Kristen's choice of IT vendors, but the value of her relationship with us went far beyond tech. We helped her with operational consulting, such as providing outsourced financial services. But really, our job was to make sure Emergence could successfully execute on their strategic plan. We pointed them toward solutions that would help them succeed at value-based care, such as automated reporting tools and data collection.

"You have your wish list," Kristen said, "of everything you want to do. But you have to be strategic about what you can spend in a year."

And when it comes to value-based care, that investment has to include the right technology.

The Importance of Partnership

It's no accident that Emergence has enjoyed productive partnerships with Netsmart and community leaders. The idea of partnering is engrained in their culture—and reflected in their strategic plan.

Emergence has created a school-based clinic in cooperation with the largest school district in El Paso, after realizing how many students they were already serving. They have become community advocates for individuals with non-visible disabilities. And as a 988 crisis health provider, the team shares documentation with local 911 operators, which can often facilitate a 988 handoff and divert the need for first responders.

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Because the state of Texas requires certain outcomes to be reported by all behavioral health providers, Emergence has selected the ones they value most and pushed the information out to the community. This "community scorecard" creates further partnership with the people of El Paso and allows them to see how Emergence is doing. In a sense, Emergence has made the savvy move from value-based care for compliance and reimbursement, to value based care directly for their consumers.

Kristen sees everyone as a partner, including the payers—a perspective that clearly reflects the philosophy behind value-based care. "Without them you cannot succeed. Really, they're a partner," Kristen said. The lesson? Practice value-based care with all your partnerships. The more visible your wins, the greater your rewards.

Data, Data, More Data

To put a spin on the old "tree in the woods" proverb: if an organization exceeds its goals but nobody sees it, did it actually happen? Not under a value-based care model. That's why it's so important to access, aggregate and analyze data to yield meaningful insights. Numbers tell the story in a way that guarantees (or denies) your potential for growth.

Kristen admits that her staff wasn't always as data driven as they are today, but she's made it part of the culture at Emergence. Because the organization receives considerable funding from the Texas Department of Health and Human Services, they are required to meet performance criteria for highly specific outcomes (similar to a CCBHC). By using her EHR and other reporting tools, Kristen and her team have developed a "data warehouse," in which metrics from all sources are aggregated to show the Texas-mandated outcomes on different dashboards. This system is easy for the entire staff to use, including providers, who appreciate the fact that reporting doesn't take all their time away from providing care. Contents of the data warehouse can also be shared securely and seamlessly with other clinical organizations.

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"It's very visual," Kristen described. "So we're able to see exactly where we are in relation to the standard. And we really watch those things." Data can be drilled down by zip code by gender, or by diagnosis—even to an individual's provider. At the end of the day, it's not just about having the data to report. It's about knowing what to do with the data, the ability to interpret the data, and how the data can translate into revenue under a value-based care system.

The Can-Do Approach

Value-based care starts with meeting people's needs. But it also requires you to prove that you're really making a difference. Kristen realizes that her strategic plan was about value-based care all along, and she credits these initiatives with turning Emergence into a well-funded powerhouse.

"It's about how can you impact lives and how you can impact the cost. I think those are the two things you have to be able to bring together," she said.

But her biggest piece of advice is to maintain a can-do attitude. "We've taken an approach of what we can do versus what we can't do." And it turns out, Emergence can do a lot.

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