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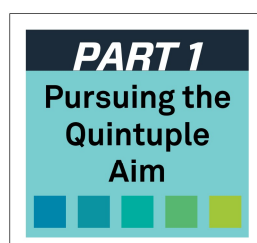
The Need for Speed

2023 Acclaim Award recipient Premier Medical Associates is accelerating on the journey to value

■ **By Francis Colangelo, MD, FACP, MS-HQS, and Mark DeRubeis, MBA**

Premier Medical Associates (PMA) was founded in 1993 in Monroeville, PA, and currently is composed of 106 providers serving more than 100,000 patients. It is the largest multispecialty physician practice in the region and a member of the Allegheny Health Network, part of the blended health organization led by Highmark Health. The practice proudly accepted AMGA's Acclaim Award in 2016.

Like most healthcare organizations, PMA faced tremendous operational pressures during the COVID-19 pandemic, but as practice activities returned to a more normal state in 2022, its



leaders decided that the restart of the Acclaim Award process would allow them to examine how the practice was performing on meeting the ideals of the Quintuple Aim.

The practice has been recognized nationally for multiple population health initiatives that have **improved the quality of care** for the patients it serves. Throughout the past decade, PMA has leveraged its membership in AMGA by participating in initiatives focused on improving the control of chronic diseases, increasing screening rates, and improving immunization rates to reduce the incidence of preventable diseases.

Attention to **reducing costs of care** was key to the practice's success, as Premier obtains approximately 60% of its revenue via risk-based contracting. The practice is a participant in a large clinically integrated network (CIN) that includes provider and hospital participants in a three-state footprint. Included among these are a Medicare Shared Savings Plan (MSSP) in which the practice plays an important leadership role. The MSSP earned significant shared savings in 2019, 2020, and 2021.

This CIN also has risk-sharing agreements with six other commercial and Medicaid insurers. The practice continues to be an innovation site to identify and establish potential cost-saving efforts for Highmark Health, an integrated delivery and finance system (IDFS). As such, Premier piloted a risk-agreement arrangement with Highmark that includes a professional fee budget and nonprofessional fee budget for both Medicare Advantage and commercially insured individuals.

Premier prioritized **improving patient experience of care**. A patient experience committee was created, and patient experience managers were appointed to every office. Physician and operational leaders visited each office and educated providers and staff on how to address patients in an empathetic and caring fashion. Operations of the practice were reorganized because of COVID-19-related staffing challenges. This reorganization freed office staff to provide more meaningful direct patient care.

Leaders of the practice are ever mindful of the need to **support providers who perform at the highest level of productivity and quality in an effort to assure their wellness**. The team-based approach to care, with employees working to the top of their license/certification, has helped to assure high-quality care, patient satisfaction, and provider wellness. The practice has attained level 3 NCQA Patient Centered Medical Home certification continuously since 2013.

With the support of the AMGA analytics team, PMA was informed

of **disparities in care** through the Collaborative for Performance Excellence. Armed with valuable data on colorectal cancer (CRC) screening rates, a decision was made to create an equity dashboard, which also included hypertension control, diabetes control, and immunization rates. Successful efforts to overcome these inequities were described as part of the Acclaim application process.

Two of the recent and innovative quality improvement efforts were described in great detail as part of the application:

- ▶ In 2017, the practice was designated an implementation site for a Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute-funded study with Dr. David Kent of Tufts Medical Center. Utilizing the predictive model for patients with prediabetes as those most at risk for transitioning to diabetes, Premier implemented efforts to improve patient engagement, resulting in better outcomes and reduced costs of care.
- ▶ The American Cancer Society predicted there would be more than 150,000 new cases of colon and rectal cancers in the United States in 2022 and that more than 52,000 Americans would die from the disease. Through a decade-long commitment to improving CRC screening rates, the practice increased its overall screening rate for patients ages 50 to 75 from 57.5% in January 2013 to above 80% by October 2016. Multiple iterative PDSA cycles were successfully used to attain this level of screening. An emphasis on patient-centered discussions and personal choice of screening modality allowed the practice to keep this screening rate greater than 80% through 2021. The practice continues to serve as a thought leader and shared a description of how Premier implemented innovative methods to assist with meeting the three strategic priorities aimed at improving outcomes set by the National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable in 2021:
 1. Practices should ensure on-time screening.
 2. Practices should ensure completion of screening following an abnormal stool-based test result via colonoscopy.
 3. Practices need to assess the cause of and address disparities in screening rates.

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AMGA Acclaim Award

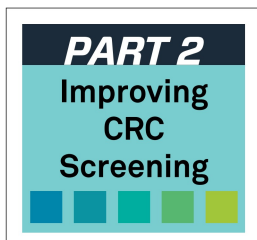
AMGA's Acclaim Award honors healthcare delivery organizations that are bringing their organization closer to the ideal medical group and health system by measurably improving patient experience of care; improving health of populations with a focus on quality outcomes; reducing the per capita cost of healthcare; and emphasizing workplace wellness.

AMGA's prestigious Acclaim Award highlights the continued research and investigation toward finding the finest models of medical management, coordination of care delivery, and a systemic approach to improving the patient and provider experience. The Acclaim Award is generously sponsored by Novo Nordisk, Inc.

For more information about the Acclaim Award, visit amga.org/acclaim.



The Need for *Speed*



As part of the Acclaim Award application process, healthcare organizations are asked to submit narratives describing major systemwide initiatives that exemplify the goals of the award. One of the narratives from Premier Medical Associates' application, "Quality, Efficiency, and Equity: Accelerating the Value Journey," is summarized below.

The American Cancer Society predicted more than 150,000 new cases of colorectal cancer (CRC) in the U.S. in 2022, with more than 52,000 Americans dying from the disease.

Premier Medical Associates (PMA), recognizing that a large number of deaths related to CRC could be prevented with effective screening, increased its overall screening rate for patients ages 50 to 75 from 57.5% in January 2013 to above 80% in October 2016. Premier's emphasis on patient-centered discussions and personal choice in screening modality allowed the practice to keep this rate greater than 80% even in 2020 and 2021, when nationwide CRC screening rates declined due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2018, the American Cancer Society recommended lowering the starting age for CRC screening from 50 to 45, and the United States Preventive Services Task Force followed suit in 2021. As PMA's screening rate for the 45–49 years age range was 35%, the practice used an automated system to text and/or call 1,516 patients who were due or overdue under the new guidelines.

Premier Medical Associates partnered with Polymedco to deliver 1,516 home CRC screening kits to patients between 45 and 49 years of age, raising the overall screening rate for this group to 53.6%.

The message read:

"The American Cancer Society and other national organizations' recommended screening for colon cancer now begins at the age of 45. There are simple, affordable options, including tests that can be done at home. You will be receiving one of these home tests in the mail shortly. Please complete and return this test as soon as possible. Please let our office know if you have any questions. Thank you."

One week later, Premier's fecal immunochemical test (FIT) kit partner, Polymedco, mailed these patients a letter explaining the importance of the test, a test kit, and a prepaid return envelope. Within a month, 433 of these patients returned a completed FIT (28.6% successful return rate), increasing the overall screening rate for this age group of patients to 53.6%. There were 19 positive FIT results out of the returned 433 (4.4% positive rate). Five advanced adenomas (>10mm size) were found and removed on colonoscopy exams of the 19 patients. As a result, this project likely greatly reduced the risk of these patients developing CRC.

Follow-Up Is Key

Fewer than 50% of patients nationwide with a positive FIT test have a timely follow-up. Premier began tracking follow-up completion statistics in 2013, long before they became a hotly debated topic in the national CRC screening spotlight. The practice put in place multiple processes to improve completion rates to some of the highest in the nation. These processes included:

- ▶ Allowing patients to complete stool-based testing at home if they agree ahead of time to consent to a colonoscopy on abnormal results



- ▶ Sending weekly lab reports to PMA's central quality office to ensure patients' notification of abnormal results
- ▶ Reminding all providers and staff that all patients with a positive FIT require a colonoscopy and that repeat non-invasive tests should never be ordered even if requested by the patient
- ▶ Arming medical assistants with a script to explain the rationale for follow-up testing if patients balk at scheduling a required colonoscopy and sending a task to the ordering provider to contact patients if they refuse scheduling
- ▶ Giving gastroenterology department schedulers a list of patients who require a timely colonoscopy due to positive FIT results for schedule prioritization
- ▶ Sending a personalized letter to patients who fail to schedule a colonoscopy within one month of notification to explain the importance of completing the screening

These combined efforts led to impressive results between 2012 and the end of 2019, when 1,447 of 1,632 patients with positive FITs eventually completed a colonoscopy for a completion rate of 88.7%.

Patient pandemic-related fears and staffing shortages negatively affected Premier's excellent record in 2020 and 2021, dropping the colonoscopy completion rate to 55.5%. Despite this drop, continued outreach regarding the importance of screening completion eventually led to 72 of 136 hesitant patients undergoing colonoscopies for a total completion rate of 79%.

Addressing Health Inequities

PMA took further action to address and overcome sources of health inequities, in line with vigorous national dialogues about disparities that gained traction in the summer of 2020. Premier's leadership calculated a 9% disparity in screening rates between White (82%) and Black (73%) patients for the practice year ending June 30, 2021.

In addition to the large-scale mailer that FIT partner Polymedco sent to patients who were overdue for screening, PMA paid an additional fee for patient navigation services that included outreach calls to Black patients at one and three weeks after mailer delivery. The script was taken from the most motivating message from the market-tested *NCCRT Messaging Guidebook for Black and African American People* and reads:

"Did you know that colorectal cancer is the third-leading cause of cancer death in both Black men and women in the United States? Colorectal cancer can be caught early or even prevented through regular screening. Most people should begin screening at age 45."

This effort was so successful that by December 31, 2021, the racial disparity between White and Black patients narrowed to just 2% (83% and 81%, respectively).

In addition to addressing health disparities, the effort meets the goals of the Quadruple Aim. Its design *reduces caregiver burden* by leveraging team-based care, contracting for additional outreach, and using automated technology to enhance screen rates. *Patient satisfaction* is assured by offering patients choice in screening modalities. The effort *improves the health of a population* by decreasing the risk that patients will suffer from late-stage CRC, and *lower costs of care* result from the prevention of more costly and devastating disease. **GPJ**



Premier Medical Associates operate in nine facilities in and around Monroeville, PA, including One Monroe Center (above).

2023 Acclaim Award

Premier Medical Associates has been named AMGA's 2023 Acclaim Award recipient. Premier Medical Associates was recognized for the following initiatives:

- ▶ Developing a strong focus on improving the control of chronic diseases, increasing screening rates, and improving immunization rates to reduce the incidence of preventable diseases
- ▶ Creating a patient experience committee and appointing patient experience managers
- ▶ Participating in a Clinically Integrated Network (CIN) that includes provider and hospital participants in a three-state footprint
- ▶ Attaining level 3 NCQA Patient Centered Medical Home certification continuously since 2013
- ▶ Creating an equity dashboard for CRC screening rates, hypertension control, diabetes control, and more

For their accomplishments, Baylor Scott & White Medical Group and Utica Park Clinic were also named Acclaim Award honorees.

Acclaim Award finalists were:

- ▶ Allina Health
- ▶ Atlantic Medical Group
- ▶ Henry Ford Medical Group
- ▶ Houston Methodist Physician Organization
- ▶ Lehigh Valley Physician Group
- ▶ SIMEDHealth
- ▶ Valley Health
- ▶ Vancouver Clinic

For more information about applying for the 2024 Acclaim Award, visit amga.org/acclaim.