

Scaling Provider Network to Optimize Value-Based Care Through Post-Graduate APP Training Program

Background

The current national deficit in primary care providers is being felt across the U.S. health care continuum – multiple months waiting for appointments, excessive referral to out-of-network specialists, high burnout amongst providers – and when taken in combination with an aging population and increased prevalence of chronic diseases, there is a significant need for increasing patient access as organizations enter value-based care arrangements. Healthcare leaders thinking toward their organization’s future state have identified better utilization of the Advanced Practice Provider (APP) workforce as key to expanding patient access, improving patient health outcomes, and increasing long-term job satisfaction across care team roles.

While many have the ambition to grow their APP workforce, hesitancy to hire new graduate Nurse Practitioner (NP) and Physician Assistant (PA) remains prevalent, largely because of the resources needed to train new providers and the typically high turnover rates cited for this group.

Although not mandatory, APP post-graduate training programs, termed fellowships, or residencies, allow organizations to hire new graduates and train them in a manner in line with system values and standards. The outcome is an APP workforce with increased confidence and competency to deliver patient care, improving both job satisfaction and retention for the organization that trained them. COPE Health Solutions (CHS) has partnered and navigated this landscape in markets across the Northeast, Southeast and Midwest regions.

Challenge

- Expedited hire of 15 APPs to fill anticipated Internal and Family Medicine (Primary Care) vacancies through 2024 based on a roadmap developed by Human Resources
- Effectively screen applicants for commitment to location and primary care setting and alignment with client’s mission and values
- Revise hiring strategy (APP new hires previously restricted to APPs with 2+ years of advanced practice experience) to capture high-potential new graduate APPs
- Lack of understanding of VBC principles and application to practice with many APPs
- Lack of understanding on how to best utilize APPs and physician alignment

Client Goals

The client is a large healthcare system spanning nationally but identified the Northeast market to pilot an APP Fellowship. They began their partnership with CHS in November 2021, with the goal of hiring and training APPs to fill 15 expected provider vacancies in primary care through 2024. Further motivating factors for partnering with CHS included the possibility for immediate fellow productivity to expand patient access and delivery of quality care for the complex, aging population. Additionally, the organization had previously limited their APP hires to those with two or more years of practice, acknowledging they did not have an adequate training structure in place to train and retain new to practice providers, but hoped to change this by switching to a fellowship model. There was also concern about physician buy in to the utilization of APPs.

Through a series of assessments with key stakeholders, CHS developed a tailored 12-month, post-graduate bridge to practice program for APPs entering the organization. CHS utilizes expert knowledge in the APP market to recruit, train and retain APPs to fit the client’s mission to expand patient access with highly trained, competent providers.

Our Approach

Assessment Phase

Interviews with key stakeholders and informants from organization to define goals for optimizing APP to physician ratio and expand patient access on team-based model utilizing APP Fellowship as cornerstone of training and integration of new-hire APPs. CHS obtained data from claims and key stakeholders to understand gaps in current care model and where there might be room for more efficiency and reduction in cost in practice.

Build Phase

Synthesize information gathered through assessment phase to tailor 12-month post-graduate training program to fit organizational goals for APP model and individual APP competencies. This allows the customized curriculum to match the clinical needs of the community as well as VBP gaps in current care model. The curriculum concentrates on three areas: clinical competency, value based care and new provider toolkit. The new provider toolkit provides training on skills not typically learned in school but much needed for practice, such as documentation, delivering bad news to patient, time management, etc.

Recruitment Phase

Recruitment of new NP and PA graduates through widespread local and national marketing. Marketing efforts include outreach to 458 NP and 302 PA schools, with focus on 115 NP and 93 PA schools in the Northeast region with both in-person and virtual recruitment events. CHS developed an enhanced screening and interview process tailored to the client with a validated rubric for assessing qualities such as emotional intelligence, commitment to practice and clinical knowledge.

Summary

The outlook for APPs (PAs and NPs) is excellent with U.S. News and World Report ranking NPs as #1 for the top 100 jobs, and PAs not far behind in the number 5 spot. The number of NP and PA schools are growing rapidly, creating continued growth in the pool of new graduates seeking employment. Organizations can have confidence in hiring new graduates by implementing a post-graduate training program as hiring, training and retention mechanism.

Results/Outcomes

Recruitment & Implementation Outcomes

- Rapid and scalable implementation of the APP Fellowship:
 - Cohort 1 “starter cohort”: 2 fellows matriculate in January 2023
 - Cohort 2: 8 fellows matriculate September 2023
 - Cohort 3: Goal of 10 fellows to matriculate September 2024
 - **Total:** 20 APP fellows to matriculate by end of 2024, 133% of initial client goal

Increased Recruitment of New Graduate APPs

- 27 applicants for 10 APP fellow positions for 2023 matriculating cohorts
 - First cohort 5 applicants, second cohort 22 applicants

Increased Clinical and VBC Competencies

- **100%** of graduated Cohort 1 fellows were evaluated by their preceptors as meeting or exceeding expectations in multiple clinical, total cost of care reduction and patient engagement/satisfaction competencies. These competencies included skills such as: establishing trust with patients, physical exam skills, appropriate utilization of referrals to specialists both in-network and out of network, accurate and comprehensive patient documentation, time management, appropriate billing and coding and correct pharmacology management.
- **100%** of comprehension quizzes taken by fellows for VBC curriculum had a passing grade of >80% in topics such as: the aging population and careful consideration towards clinical guidelines to manage multiple chronic conditions, risk management and the importance of identifying and closing patient care gaps, optimizing quality and understanding organizational provider performance metrics, identifying potential risk/new barriers in assessing burden of illness, high and low value services including referrals, palliative care and end of life services and managing appropriate intervals for follow-up for chronic care management.



Contact us to learn how we can help you with workforce challenges at info@copehealthsolutions.com or 213-259-0245.