                           The Eggplant

Valley Medical Group, P.C. Staff Newsletter           Volume XVII, Issue 6, July 6, 2017

Whenever we discuss the mission of VMG and our values, we always talk about improving the health of our communities and all of our patients. That’s why we “invest” in programs, processes, and staffing that many other Groups don’t have. Examples include our approach to substance use disorders and our CSRP Program, our continuous commitment to remain open to Medicaid patients, our commitment to local and national charities and organizations, our staying open for Urgent Care (weekend and evening hours), triage nurses, our health center (“everything under one roof”) model, etc. This is an ongoing process and like everything in life, there is always more to learn and improve.

Our Board is responsible for identifying these learning opportunities for our Group. We look for areas of unmet needs in our patient population to both improve and grow our services and to do what we can to remedy any barriers to our delivery of care and health services that affect the way patients use our services.

**Where to Start**

Some of the work in being a leading organization in providing healthcare is in understanding the patient experience. We provide better care to patients when we can “walk in their shoes” and see things from their perspective. In our work every day we ask ourselves “would I do anything differently if this patient were my mother, brother, best friend.” When you have a personal experience with a disease, condition, or if you feel some unmet need that your patient feels, you are probably better able to care for and about people in similar situations. But we can’t have personal experience with everything we encounter in medicine so we have to be willing to educate ourselves so that we can better understand the patient experience.

This year we have selected two areas that deserve a new focus. The first is to improve and grow our approach to children and families. That project is scheduled to start this fall. Here, the goal will be to become more child and family friendly and to grow our pediatric population. Here are some questions we should all ask ourselves: As a parent, when you walk into our reception areas (aka, waiting rooms) do they feel welcoming to parents and kids? Do you feel our work flows are best for pediatric patients?

The second is to improve our approach to LGBTQ patients with the goal of improving their care and health outcomes while also helping them to feel more welcomed and affirmed in our practice. We established a workgroup and the workgroup found some early helpful changes (you’ve seen the changed signs for our rest rooms already and we are working on some of our forms as well as other things that the workgroup will be reporting to you). We also held two community forums to hear directly from our LGBTQ community members and patients.

We will be sharing what we learned in the upcoming trainings (see below). Here are some relevant questions: If you are LGBTQ, can you find a magazine in our reception areas that speaks to you? As a transgendered individual, do you have a way to communicate with our staff about how you would like to be addressed? What do we do well? What could we do better?

**Training**

You have also already seen that we will all receive formal training in the coming weeks. The goal of the training is to help us become more sensitive to the difficulties our LGBTQ patients encounter as they seek healthcare, find ways to be more welcoming, and to “up our game” in helping to improve their health. This is not different from our approaches to other segments of our patient populations. We (you) have generally done a very good job in making sure that our approaches to caring for patients are as free of bias and stereotypes as possible. *However, just as with racial or economic bias, it’s what we are not aware of that can cause the most trouble in contributing to patients feeling less than welcomed and affirmed.* This training is aimed at helping us do a better job at treating all our patients with respect, dignity, and the kindness that touches people and aids their ability to participate in their care.

We hope you will find the training useful and productive. Thanks for being a Group willing to learn and to grow as we work together to improve the health of all  of our patients and communities.

Meghan and Joel