                           The Eggplant

**Valley Medical Group, P.C. Staff Newsletter           Volume XVIII, Issue 1, Jan. 24, 2018**

Happy New Year!

We often think about the New Year as a new start, a time to start over. But we’re human and we don’t really get to start over. What we can do is improve, make things better, converse and hear each other. That’s as important in the work we do with patients as it is in the work we do with each other.

One thing I learned last year from a book called *Humble Inquiry* (and this is one of those “of course moments”) is that there is a difference between “telling” and “asking.” Usually, telling is about the people in the front of the room giving information to the people they are facing. It has its purpose. That’s mostly what we have done in our Brown Bag Meetings. We have “scripts” for how to handle these situations. If I ask “how are you?” most of you will say “OK” or “fine.”

But our work is very complex and requires teamwork and deeper understanding of what we each need and face in our work together. For me to learn and understand more, I need to do more asking, listening. As an example, what if I ask “what about you?” There is no script for that. Will I learn more about what’s on your mind? About what you know that I don’t know about your work and our work together? Will that help us improve what we do together?

We’ll continue to have Brown Bag Meetings because there are things, information, goals, etc. that we have to transmit. But we’re going to also do something else this year. Gina Campbell (our new VP for Clinical Operations), Greg Folta, and I will be “rounding” in each center and in each department. What we hope to do is listen more to you and your ideas for improving what we do at VMG for our patients and our staff. We’ll start in February.

Here are some things I need to tell you today. I’ve had several people ask about the fourth quarter revenue incentive (October – December of 2017). We did not meet our goal for the quarter. We fell short of our budget by about 900K. Here are the results:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Month | Budgeted Revenue Goal | Actual Revenue | Result |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| October | $3,107,817 | $2,827,945 | -$279,872 | Missed Goal |
| November | $3,015,641 | $2,802,461 | -$213,180 | Missed Goal |
| December | $2,986,697 | $2,572,564 | -$414,133 | Missed Goal |
| TOTAL FOR QUARTER | $9,110,155 | $8,205,970 | -$911,185 | Missed Goal |

Most of the variance in the budget is the result of fewer than anticipated practitioners by the end of the year. We’ve been able to replace most of that loss by the end of the year so that should help with 2018. And even though we were short of our budget we were able to provide the Thanksgiving present and the end of the year bonus.

Our budget for this year will again include a staff compensation increase. Most, if not all, will be based on your evaluations (merit raises). Once we have the budget finalized in the next few weeks, we’ll be able to announce the timing of the raise and other details. We know we do a lot more for patients than other practices and that your work allows us to do that and you are appreciated for all that you do.

I think it’s important that we continue to focus on what we have achieved as well as look for ways to keep improving. So here are some of the things that we did together last year:

We have remained open to patients in all locations, growing the Group especially in Franklin County, the most underserved region in the Valley, where other practices have either closed their doors or stopped taking new patients. This includes patients with commercial insurance, Medicare, as well as Medicaid. New patient growth remains on the order of 100 patients per month in Hampshire County location and near 200 per month in Franklin County. This means that we are able to serve our communities with vital care. No small achievement.

Even though some providers retired or left the practice, we were able to recruit and bring new practitioners in to replace them. We are still recruiting for physicians in primary and specialty care, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and other professionals.

Our total medical expense as reported by state agencies and health plans remains good and our traditions of guideline and evidence based care continues to keep utilization in the appropriate ranges, providing needed care and services and avoiding unnecessary procedures and services. This is important to us as citizens and as providers because it means we can deliver greater value for the dollars spent on care.

Our Ambulatory Surgical Center provides GI services at significant savings to the payers as do our Laboratory services. Our high cost radiology utilization, ER use, and inpatient admits and readmits continue to be a strength of the Group. We continue our tradition of keeping care local, as possible. This is all good for patients and good for us and the people who pay us.

We have continued to expand and enhance our programs to combat opioid and other substance use with positive results and patient feedback. Our practitioners and staff have taken a leading role in our region in education about these problems and in creating work flows and services to improve the health of this population and lower their risks for health problems.

We continued to expand our smoking cessation efforts, growing in successful clinical and financial outcomes during the course of the year (patients counseled, groups/classes started, and paid FFS dollars). We’ve achieved about a 5% reduction in smoking in that population last year. That translates to lives saved and improved for patients, their families and communities.

We now have Integrated Behavioral Health specialists in all of our centers. Patient and clinician satisfaction with these services continues to be greater than expected and we believe that we have avoided ER and hospital admits as a result (though this is hard to measure).

We continue to expand our Shared Medical Appointments for hypertension control, weight loss, tobacco and substance issues and diabetes care. These are important for health outcomes as it expands our ability to reach more patients and the support of others is appreciated by patients.

This is just an abbreviated list. We and you have done a lot more to help patients and our communities. I want to end with just one more. We began a post-visit patient satisfaction survey late last year and we’ve been getting interesting feedback from patients. There are things we can improve (“opportunities”) as well as words of appreciation for our staff and services. Here’s an abbreviated list (often direct quotes from the surveys):

Opportunities:

* Providing some "high chairs" would be useful to patients with back problems
* If there are going to be chemical hand sanitizers all over the waiting area exam room please make sure they are fragrance-free
* I highly recommend that each staff member wear a visible name badge.
* Would like to be told upon registering if my provider is running behind and by how much.
* Dry erase marker was too bold at tip.....my answers could be easily misread as could my signature if even readable at all.
* Being in a wheelchair I find it very difficult to get to magazines.
* There was a lot of whispering with the provider and her assistant in her office with the door open while I was in the waiting area talking about another patient. It would have been more appropriate to have those confidential conversations with the door closed.

Praises:

* The staff on the front line is excellent.  If they can't answer a question they send it to triage and I was answered within an hour or less.
* I have never encountered any negative personalities when going to Valley Medical Group.  Everyone seems to be upbeat and very caring.  They treat you like real people not just another co-pay or a number
* The people at the blood lab are also absolutely wonderful.
* Thank you for giving me the opportunity to express this. I am grateful that you have the patient portal.
* Developed a very patient oriented health care system. Somewhere along the line VMG must have decided to make a great effort to recognize that the last thing an ill person needs is unnecessary complications in having access to quality health care. Over the past several years I have been amazed at how quickly I am seen for appointments and how well I am looked after.
* When I called in the receptionist told me to come in at 9:35. When I got there she had put it on next Friday instead of this day. But the receptionist very quickly got things straightened out and I was seen immediately.
* They are helping me powerfully with my work on alcoholism recovery. I am very grateful; to everyone at VMG from the start (receptionists) to finish (check-out process). I am also grateful that we can get same day visits even if our primary doctor is not available.
* I like the many different offices and providers so I can always get help when I need it.  Although I do prefer going to my own PCP and wish I could always see her when I need help it's good another provider is always available for me to see and get needed care and also that they have all my information in the computer and can easily access it and understand it! The urgent care hours and doctors on call are also very comforting to know is there and I was able to call and get help I needed over the phone even on the holiday weekend.
* The members of my team—including the assistants-- are top of the line. They care. I couldn't imagine a more outstanding group of professionals. Despite chronic pain I actually feel comfortable and nurtured with each of them.
* Every individual whom I have come in contact with at Valley Medical has been the epitome of professionalism with the perfect balance of kindness. Everyone from PT to the lab to the receptionists has been so friendly and wonderful to deal with. I always speak very highly of the care AND people of Valley Medical.
* I have come to appreciate the "one-stop shopping" aspect and have found the staff to be excellent.  I had my last mammogram at VMG and appreciated the relaxed and easy way in which preparation/execution of the procedure was handled.  I also am glad you offer Urgent Care on the weekends which will sometimes preclude having to go to the emergency room.
* I dropped in the office about a month ago without an appointment for an issue I had.  This was during the lunch hour no one was around. I sat in the waiting room. A gentleman came by and asked if I needed assistance. I said I would wait until the lunch period was over he insisted that he would find someone to help me.  He did and a nurse came out to see me and question my health concerns.  I very much appreciated this service.  Wish I knew the name of the man to say thank you.  All the staff I’ve worked with in office and phone are very courteous.  They are very much appreciated. Thank you to all Valley Med staff and physicians.
* I was unscheduled in pain and I know that women at other practices in this country under the same circumstances would have horrible experiences. Everyone at Valley Medical Group was so incredibly wonderful. It was an incredibly bright spot on an otherwise not great day and I truly truly appreciate their kindness and care. You all do wonderful amazing work. THANK YOU.
* I was thrilled to be able to get a flu shot yesterday during my visit to Dr. Brown. the nurse offered it, gave clear instructions about it, and asked my permission to have another newly-hired nurse watch the procedure. I was very impressed and very grateful to get the flu shot. Thank you.

Our patients know how hard we work and the value we offer and they are also able to suggest things we can improve. We’ll be collecting these responses and getting them out to you over the course of the year to keep our patients’ views front and center for us all.

What we need to do, in general, this year is the work you’ve already been doing: improving access to scheduled appointments, same-day services and urgent care (“fill the schedules”) and improving rates of services that indicate high quality care and compliance with preventive health guidelines (“all eyes on the patient” and their needs)

So please keep filling our schedules for needed services, increasing mammography rates for women needing those services, improving rates of testing for patients with diabetes, collecting past due balances, copays, and deductibles at reception and in billing, etc. Even if you are not directly involved in the activities above, everyone has a role in making the Group work better (welcoming patients and families to the health center, keeping the Centers looking good, treating patients, families, visitors and each other with kindness and respect).

All your good work does matter in achieving our clinical goals for patients as well as improving our revenues to fund the business. Thank you again.

Joel