



WHN SHARP SHOOTERS ACKNOWLEDGES

Paul Ponstein, DO, Westshore Health Network

Collaboration key to improving health care quality

by Paul Ponstein, D.O.

The value of partnering to improve the quality of health care is at the heart of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan's Value Partnerships initiative.

The name "Value Partnerships" is apt since it speaks not only to the inherent value of partnerships, but the importance of enhancing the value and efficiency of the health care system overall. Through Value Partnerships, physicians and hospital representatives have an opportunity to collaborate to achieve our common goal of improving wellness in our communities.

Working to improve the care of patients — particularly those with chronic diseases — is something that goes far beyond the mission of Value Partnerships and one of its key components, the Physician Group Incentive Program. It's at the heart of two other organizations I'm involved with — The Regional Delivery Network of West Michigan and the Alliance for Health.

The RDNWM includes five West Michigan physician hospital organizations, including Westshore Health Network, that together serve as a beacon to guide health care practitioners, hospitals, insurers, employers and patients toward a common goal of healthier communities.

The nonprofit Alliance for Health unites consumers, employers, payers and health care delivery systems to help ensure that all people in the region have optimal health and the most effective and efficient health care services available. To underscore the value of our relationship with the Blues, representatives from the Blues participate with both of these organizations.

In support of our efforts, the Alliance for Health was awarded a grant to develop a regional information technology infrastructure for

health care information exchange. The goal is to provide safer, timelier and more efficient and effective care in whatever health care settings patients find themselves in throughout the region.

These are examples of the kind of health care enhancements that can be made when physicians, insurers, consumers and other segments of the community come together to address health care issues.

The Value Partnerships initiative can point to similarly impressive achievements. For example, PGIP has been responsible for \$7 million in savings from cost-effective prescribing, along with significant investments in patient registries, electronic medical records and e-prescribing. Furthermore, I believe that PGIP has been instrumental in helping WHN and the RDNWM become what they are today.

What I like most about the initiative is that it's truly global in its approach; it not only focuses on primary care physicians but on specialists and hospitals. It also has an exceptionally strong collaborative component, which allows physicians to work together with BCBSM to achieve shared goals in an innovative way.

With the complexity of today's health care system, it's important for everyone to pull together to improve health care, access to quality health care and cost-effectiveness. BCBSM recognized this when they made the decision to develop Value Partnerships — a program that can have a profound impact on the future of health care in the state with the active participation of physicians and hospitals throughout Michigan.

Dr. Paul Ponstein is the medical director of Westshore Health Network in West Michigan and is one of the original members of the Physician Group Incentive Program, part of the Value Partnerships initiative.

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