

ABSTRACT: 2023 ELH Institutional Action Project (IAP)

Project Title: Development of a Strategic Plan for an Outpatient Palliative Medicine Clinic

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Background:

Palliative Care Medicine (PCM) is devoted to improving quality of life for people who have serious illness. Research has shown that outpatient PCM clinics improve patient satisfaction, symptom management, quality of life, and reduce health care costs by preventing unnecessary hospital admissions and emergency department visits.

Eastern Virginia Medical School (EVMS), a public medical school, and Sentara HealthCare, a not-for-profit health care system, have had a close relationship providing clinical services, education, and research to the Hampton Roads area in Virginia. Despite this, the major source of PCM support lies within the acute care hospital services with limited access to outpatient PCM clinics.

Current Status: Patients in our catchment area have limited access to outpatient PCM services. The Hospice and Palliative Medicine (HPM) Fellow's Clinic operates one half-day per week, serving individuals with serious illness regardless of diagnosis. The only other PCM clinic is the Supportive Care Clinic located within the Sentara Brock Cancer Center (SBCC) which provides PCM services to individuals with cancer. Virginia Oncology Associates (VOA), the largest oncology practice in the community, also resides in the SBCC.

Objectives:

In collaboration with our healthcare system partners, we aimed to perform an in-depth analysis of potential opportunities and challenges in establishing a PCM Clinic for individuals with serious illness beyond cancer diagnoses in various settings.

Short Term: Perform a needs assessment to understand volume and evaluate demand for PCM clinics for different patient populations

Long-Term: Establish PCM clinics that serve individuals who not only cancer, but other serious illnesses

Methods: A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) Analysis was conducted via literature review and extensive interviews with key stakeholders in both clinical and administrative roles from EVMS, Sentara, and VOA.

Outcomes: The SWOT analysis revealed alignment between EVMS, Sentara, and VOA goals including:

- Improved symptom management
- Enhanced coordination of care
- Better quality patient care

Information from these interviews also provided analysis of clinical operations data and development of proformas, informing a future operational strategy and business plan.

Further, during discussions for a PCM clinic funded by the EVMS-Sentara Joint Program Committee (JPC), a project developed with the Sentara Accountable Care Organization resulting in establishing a program to focus on high risk populations. When JPC funds were placed on hold, the SBCC proposed funding for a clinic in their facility.

Discussion: Opportunities to develop hospital system partnerships to support PMCs exist, but the need to prioritize is necessary.

Next Steps:

- SBCC Palliative Medicine Clinic will be initial focus as financial support is available
- Create business plan

Lessons Learned: Listen, then be open and prepared for opportunities to arise – where one door closes, another opens. Flexibility and adaptability are necessary.