

Client Spotlight: The PinnacleHealth Spine Institute of Harrisburg, PA

Introduction

Priority Consult, LLC, is a healthcare solutions company that has developed highly specialized software applications for spine centers and oncology programs. Specific to spine, Priority Consult Spine has defined the key activities inherent in spine center patient work flow and helps organizations create processes that improve the patient experience and clinical outcomes. Priority Consult Spine includes a comprehensive suite of the tools necessary to implement an intake, triage and patient tracking system. Additionally, over the past five years, Priority Consult has collaborated with over twenty spine program clients to develop an expertise in clinical outcomes collection, protocol development and reporting. The outcomes collection and reporting capabilities are available for both surgical and non-surgical patients. This client spotlight is an overview of Pinnacle Health's use of Priority Consult Spine as an integral component of their Spine Institute.

PinnacleHealth Situation and Goals in 2009

PinnacleHealth, based in Central Pennsylvania, is comprised of Harrisburg Hospital and Community General Hospital, with a third hospital to open in 2014. The spine program is in place at both hospitals. One of the core goals of the PinnacleHealth Spine Institute is to provide a consistent level of quality care across both campuses. In 2009, prior to development of the Spine Institute, PinnacleHealth's primary objective was to create a Spine Center of Excellence. By identifying strategies to grow the market share and geographic reach of PinnacleHealth for spine, the system and its physicians could serve a larger patient and medical professional base with comprehensive services of exceptional quality.

Pinnacle had a large staff of orthopedic, neurosurgical and other specialty spine physicians providing services at two campuses, Harrisburg Hospital and Community General Hospital. PinnacleHealth had an opportunity to be the leading provider of spine care in both its primary service area and regionally in Central Pennsylvania. The system had many of the elements of spine care; however, the services were fragmented, resulting in less collaboration with medical staff, loss of market share and the absence of a programmatic platform for continual service improvement. Vega Healthcare, in coordination with Marshall Steele & Associates, conducted an assessment of PinnacleHealth's spine services and recommended development of inpatient spine programming and comprehensive outpatient services. PinnacleHealth engaged Marshall Steele & Associates to support the development of inpatient spine services.

The PinnacleHealth Spine Institute

The Spine Institute's programs are located on both PinnacleHealth campuses. The Harrisburg Hospital program is housed on the Spine, Bone and Joint Institute floor with 42 private rooms and at Community General Hospital, currently with nine private rooms. The Community General Hospital will expand in the fall of 2013 to 32 private rooms. Between the two programs there are about 1600 surgical spine cases annually, with fourteen orthopedic and neurosurgical surgeons participating. Both the Harrisburg and Community General spine programs have received significant industry recognition through The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) disease specific **Certification for Spine Surgery** as well as Blue Cross's **Blue Distinction for Spine Surgery**. These recognitions are evidence of PinnacleHealth Spine Institute's commitment to excellence in care design and delivery.

Since its start in 2010, Pinnacle has developed an impressive array of services under the umbrella of the PinnacleHealth Spine Institute. According to Vicki Marth, MS, BSN, CCM, Administrative Director for the Institute, "The institute is a combination of orthopedic surgeons and neurosurgeons, as well as non-surgical treatment providers - physiatrists, pain management specialists, Physical and Occupational therapists and certified McKenzie therapists." She adds, "Nurse navigators and care coordinators help patients glide seamlessly through appropriate treatment and recovery."

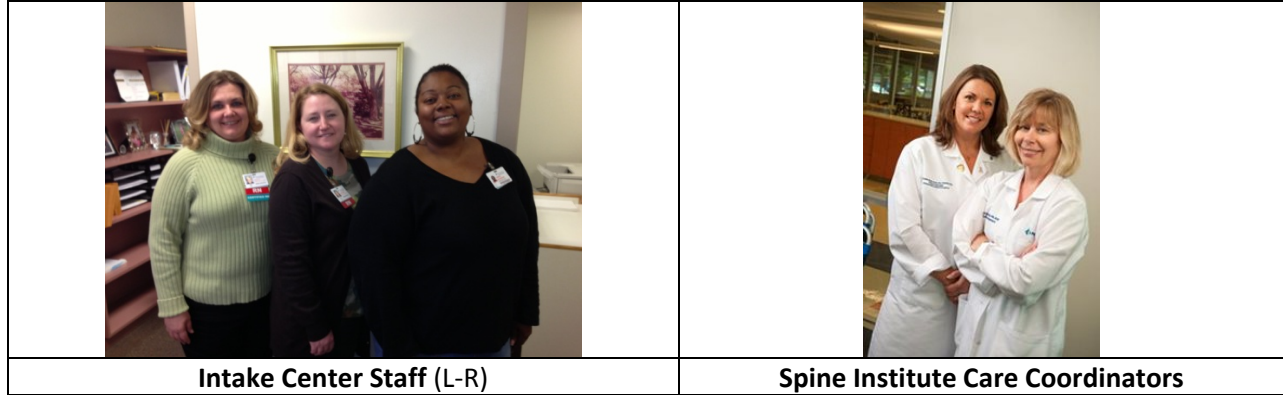


Vicki Marth, Administrative Director

When a patient calls the institute, 1-877-499-SPINE, an Intake Specialist collects a detailed medical history and any available diagnostic images. Marth explains, "Our physicians look at all that information and make a decision on the best treatment option, right then. This benefits the patient tremendously. Instead of waiting 4-8 weeks to see a surgeon - when the patient may not even be a surgical candidate - a physician can recommend non-surgical treatment modalities to be initiated prior to a surgical evaluation, trialing various therapies to determine if there is an improvement in the patient's condition."

Navigation Spans Outpatient and Inpatient Care

Most hospitals and spine programs are heavily focused on inpatient services and care. The future of spine care will require a balance with additional focus on outpatient services as about 90% of patients with back and neck pain will not be surgical candidates. Nurse navigation has led to an accessible and reliable system of care for outpatient services, as well as the traditional inpatient focus. The Spine Institute's Nurse Navigators, Paula Robel, RN, and Heather Laudenslager, RN, along with Intake Specialists Angel Bazemore and Caralie Foltz, support patients through every aspect of care. Nurse Care Coordinators Kimberly Hohenshelt, RN, and Margaret Brady, RN, offer coordination of inpatient care for patients having surgery. All serve as patient advocates, providing a connection and a sense of security for patients.



Paula Robel, RN, Nurse Navigator;
 Heather Laudenslager, RN, Nurse Navigator;
 Angel Bazemore, Intake Specialist; Caralie Foltz,
 Intake Specialist

Kimberly Hohenshelt, RN, and
 Margaret Brady, RN

Primary Care Physicians & The Intake Center

PinnacleHealth has 25 Primary Care Practices and six Specialty Practices. For most health systems, growth and practice acquisition is a strategy to build a broad network of primary care practices that support more accessible, coordinated and integrated care. With the vast majority of referrals to spine care being made by primary care, improved access and service are critically important to primary care physicians. All of these are consistently delivered to primary care physicians through PinnacleHealth Spine Institute’s Intake Center.

For the PinnacleHealth Spine Institute, competitors have become much more active in the marketplace over the last two years. This more competitive environment has emphasized the need for the program to differentiate itself from competitors on issues of access, triage, communication, coordination and follow up. Referring physicians are reacting favorably to the new approach, especially with the start-to-finish support services for patients. By focusing on delivering this level of care and service, the Spine Institute will continue to grow and cement primary care physician referral patterns.

PinnacleHealth, in collaboration with Priority Consult, developed the **Quick Reference Card** below for use with referring physician practices. In addition to a brief description of the program, the card describes an easy process for referring patients to the Intake Center. Developing the card was a first step that was followed by a focused educational campaign aimed at primary care physicians and staff. This educational process is essential to grow and sustain the referral base. Ease of access and use, responsiveness and consistently reliable case management are prized by primary care practices that are typically very busy and have a high volume of patients with back and neck pain.

The **Quick Reference Card** is printed on a heavy card stock paper

pinnaclehealth.org/spine

PinnacleHealth
Spine Institute

Priority
CONSULT®

PinnacleHealth Spine Institute Quick Reference Card

The Spine Institute is a multidisciplinary group of physicians and other providers specialized in neurosurgery, orthopedic spine surgery, physiatry, pain management and rehabilitation services who collaborate to provide the best possible outcomes and experience for your patient.

The intake, triage and referral process using Priority Consult® is a rapid review of your patient's medical condition, followed by initiation of care.

- 1) Complete a referral form. Include the patient's name, address, phone numbers, insurance, patient's symptoms and/or diagnosis.
- 2) If you have a surgeon preference your patient's information will be reviewed by the requested physician.
- 3) Fax the completed form to (717) 782-2780.
 - An Intake Specialist will contact your patient, obtain a detailed review of your patient's condition and acquire any imaging studies the patient had done previously.
 - Within 72 hours of receipt of histories, images and reports, the surgeon will review this information and make appropriate treatment recommendations. They may include imaging, physical therapy, pain management, physiatry and/or a surgeon appointment.
 - We may ask you to authorize components of the treatment plan, such as additional testing or physical therapy if necessary.
 - A nurse navigator, a nurse specializing in spine care, will contact the patient and coordinate the patient's treatment, education, and testing. You will receive written communication regarding your patient's progress.
 - Surgical patients will be contacted by a nurse care coordinator who will provide pre-op education, coordination during hospitalization and follow-up after discharge. Your patient will receive nursing care in dedicated spine units with private rooms at the Harrisburg or Community Campuses.

Call us toll-free at 1-877-499-SPINE.

Spine Program description

Instructions for office staff

What to expect

Single point of access; 1-877-499-SPINE

Physicians Review in Priority Consult

Most of the Spine Institute surgeons perform their own reviews. To provide additional support for the physicians, Dr. Amy Zellers, Family Practice and Sports Medicine Physician, was hired to participate in the triage process. Dr. Zellers brings an unbiased view to the nonsurgical or surgical triage disposition and a holistic approach that occasionally captures hidden symptoms that might otherwise be missed.



Amy Zellers, D.O.

Of the referrals that are made to the Intake Center, approximately 56% are “unassigned,” which means that the referring physician’s office or the self-referred patient do not express a specific physician preference. If a physician preference is expressed, the Intake Center staff assigns the patient to the requested physician. All triage recommendations are sent to the primary care physician for his or her

approval. Once intake and triage are completed, patients are assigned to a physician and also remain in the Priority Consult Spine record for navigation throughout the full episode of care. About 60% of triage recommendations are for non-surgical interventions, with the remaining patients referred to a surgeon.

Even those surgeons who do not use Priority Consult for their office-based patients can refer potentially “urgent” patients for immediate review and triage, rather than scheduling them into “next available” appointments. This serves the patient well by having a more expedited evaluation and supports the practice by differentiating which patients need urgent appointments with the surgeon.



William Beutler, M.D., FACS

As Medical Director for the Spine Institute, William Beutler, M.D., FACS, offered the following comments:

“I have found Priority Consult Spine to be of great benefit for my spine practice. I am able to communicate quickly with the patient and referring physician via my comments in the suggestion box. The reviews are completed within days of referral. Both patients and the primary care physicians have found such communication to be helpful, especially if the patient was triaged to another physician or for further testing. Priority Consult Spine provides the unique tools to be able to triage potential patients in terms of need for an expedited office visit. Unique to Priority Consult Spine is that all of the films, the history, and the reports are accessible during the triage process. PinnacleHealth has seen consistent growth in the volume of referrals to the Intake Center since inception (2010: 305, 2011: 714, and 2012: 762.) The surgeons that are new to the area have reported the growth in personal referrals because of the Spine Institute’s marketing and referral capabilities.”

Accountable Care and Patient Navigation

As healthcare systems seek to develop an infrastructure for Accountable Care Organizations, Priority Consult Spine’s comprehensive care coordination program: patient tracking, patient education and the coordination of services, are compatible with the core goals of Accountable Care as defined by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services’ (CMS) website:

“Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) are groups of doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers, who come together voluntarily to give coordinated high quality care to their Medicare patients. The goal of coordinated care is to ensure that patients, especially the chronically ill, get the right care at the right time, while avoiding unnecessary duplication of services and preventing medical errors. When an ACO succeeds both in both delivering high-quality care and spending health care dollars more wisely, it will share in savings it achieves for the Medicare program.” (<http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-Service-Payment/ACO/index.html?redirect=/aco/>)

As more hospitals and physicians align under new care and reimbursement models, such as ACOs and bundled payment, navigation and outcomes collection offers support across the treatment continuum. More effective and efficient care is fostered, while reducing variability of care, redundancy and unnecessary costs.

Outcomes Collection & Reporting

Priority Consult Spine incorporated an outcomes collection system in 2008 and now has more than 20 spine programs participating, including PinnacleHealth Spine Institute. In speaking with over 100 spine surgeons across the country, I have found only one physician who collected functional outcomes data on surgical patients. Most surgeons acknowledge the value of collecting data, but few do it. For the Spine Institute, Priority Consult Spine provides a support platform for collecting surgical and non-surgical outcomes data.

While the program has a very deliberate focus on applying patient functional outcomes data, such as the Oswestry and Neck Disability Index instruments, they are targeting a sufficient sample size to have valid, actionable results. At the designated intervals of initial/pre-operative, 3, 6, 12 and 24 months, the targeted percentage of collections is 20% of all patients at the three and six month marks.

Conclusion

The PinnacleHealth Spine Institute, with its large staff of medical and surgical spine specialists and programs at two campuses, has developed the highest quality spine programming for surgical care. Of equal importance is their development of intake, triage and navigation across in- and out-patient settings. The Spine Institute continues to thrive and build upon their successes serving patients with detailed guidance throughout the care continuum and serving their community physicians with rapid access, thorough communication and comprehensive spine care.

PATRICK VEGA, M.S., is Principal for Vega Healthcare. He performed an *Assessment of Spine Services for Pinnacle Health* in 2009 and made recommendations for development and improvement.

Patrick brings over 25 years of achievement in hospitals and healthcare organizations. Patrick consults, writes and speaks in spine, neurosciences and orthopedics in the areas of strategic assessment, planning and center of excellence development.