



IT'S TIME!

PICK YOUR PARTNER FOR HEALTHCARE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT SUCCESS

The healthcare sector is undergoing dramatic change. The rules around caring for patients – and being compensated for that care – are very different under the value- and outcome-based model that is becoming the norm. In response to these new conditions, many healthcare providers are turning to advisory services, consultancies and solutions vendors to help them analyze their performance and leverage their data to improve quality, patient safety, and clinical and financial outcomes.

That's a wise move. If you're among those considering this option, however, you should make sure that you are signing on with a partner that truly has the experience and expertise you need. That translates into intimate knowledge of all

facets of the healthcare industry, as well as end-to-end competency in analyzing data generated along the healthcare continuum to deliver actionable quality improvements.

Here are some considerations to keep in mind as you vet candidates:

- **What is the potential partner's overall experience in the healthcare sector?**

You know your medical practice or healthcare facility is a very different animal from an accountant's office or a regional bank. The question is, does the consultant? Your prospective partner may be an expert in applying information technology solutions and wrangling data to

solve generic business problems. The healthcare industry, however, is anything but generic!

That's why you need to work with a partner who legitimately can lay claim to years – even decades – of real-world experience in the healthcare delivery space, not an organization whose familiarity with the sector stems from what its consultants have read about electronic health record meaningful use incentives in the latest medical journal articles. You don't want to be the guinea pig that suffers through delays and mistakes as your partner builds its own street cred in this space.

Before you go any further, ask for a documented accounting of qualitative results the candidate has achieved in the healthcare sector. If it can't provide one, you should pass.

▪ **What specific expertise does the potential partner have with the party that pays more than 55 percent of the healthcare bills in the U.S. – aka, the federal government?**

Over the last 30 years, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has been the driver of the healthcare industry in the U.S. It sets the vision and spearheads the efforts – like those around value-based purchasing and financial incentives for meeting prescribed quality measures – that ultimately will be taken up by the commercial healthcare insurance sector.

Clearly, then, it is in your best interest to secure a partnership with a firm that has deep experience as a CMS Quality Improvement Organization (QIO). These providers have been at the forefront of initiatives to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, economy, and quality of services delivered to Medicare beneficiaries across multiple healthcare settings, and they can bring the knowledge they've gained in that capacity to your own organization to optimize care goals, cost reductions, and financial outcomes.

▪ **How will your potential partner help you transform the way your services are delivered as the country's healthcare system moves to a business model that incentivizes performance and quality – and penalizes those providers that can't live up to critical metrics?**

If the answer is that the candidate will bring a pre-conceived solution to your organization, you

may want to think twice about the value you'll be getting out of that relationship. Given that practices and facilities span the spectrum in terms of how advanced they are in supporting quality metrics and meaningful use requirements, what you really want is a partner that personalizes its solutions to support your particular needs.

A good partner should be able to design and implement a custom healthcare plan that improves patient outcomes and ultimately can increase revenue for a healthcare system, as well. A personalized plan that leads to fewer hospital readmissions thanks to better coordinated care of patients with certain conditions, for example, can help hospitals avoid Medicare penalties for unnecessary repeat stays. But perhaps more important is this: Once the data makes it clear that a hospital is succeeding at minimizing patient returns, the facility's position in the community can be bolstered, potentially leading more patients to seek services at its doorstep.

Ideally, a partner will be able to construct a tailored solution to solve any healthcare delivery system's needs based on a proven framework that takes into account thresholds for success, improvement strategies, measures for goal attainment, and execution and ongoing evaluation. In reality, very few consultants can attest to having in place a model that lays the groundwork for walking clients through all the stages they need to cover to realize true quality and revenue improvement.

▪ **Does your potential partner cover all aspects of the healthcare consulting picture related to healthcare quality improvement?**

Don't be surprised if most of the possible partners you talk with tell you that they handle only one or two pieces of the puzzle. Perhaps their expertise is in determining security risks from auditing your data, for instance.

Working with a partner with such a limited perspective is simply not an optimized way to advance your organization to the point where it can stay on target with individual and industry goals for accountable care, care coordination, operational efficiency, value-based performance, and other items related to the expansive healthcare reform agenda.

It's by far a better approach to work with a partner that offers a soup-to-nuts menu to assure healthcare quality improvements and better financial outcomes. Rather than your partner just conducting a security risk assessment, for example, you want to work with a party that, once it identifies issues, can fix those problems, measure whether those fixes meet approval standards, and ensure continuous improvement through ongoing testing and reporting.

In other words, you want a partner who will take quality improvement through to the finish line – not one who just throws the ball downfield.

■ **What can you expect of your ongoing working relationship with your potential partner?**

The support and service a consultant can offer your practice or institution may not be the first thing you are thinking about when you are considering how you can reduce costs, improve patient care and enhance revenue. But it's guaranteed that it will move very high up the agenda once you are in the midst of attempting to

transform your organization to get – and stay – in step with a value-based care patient model and payment structure.

So, it's important to discover upfront how embedded with your own systems your partner will be and how responsive it can be to help calls. If things look good, go one step further and inquire whether this assistance is part of the overall plan, or if getting it is going to add up to significant post-deployment costs.

As you discuss these questions with potential candidates, it increasingly will become apparent to you that there aren't many providers that can provide the answers to all these questions that you want to hear. One that can, though, is Primaris HealthCare Business Solutions.

To learn more about what it can offer, visit Primaris at <http://primaris.org>, or contact the healthcare consultancy and services expert at online@primaris.org or 800-735-6776.