



# ACCOUNTABLE CARE GUIDE FOR HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE

The Importance of Hospice and Palliative Care in the Approaching Accountable Care Era.





## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This strategic guide involved input through participation by many thought leaders of the following sponsoring organizations who have come together to form the Toward Accountable Care (TAC) Consortium and Initiative. This paper would not have been possible without the generous support of all TAC Consortium member organizations, including significant support from the North Carolina Medical Society, as well as a substantial grant from The Physicians Foundation. Special thanks to the North Carolina Academy of Family Physicians and North Carolina Society of Anesthesiologists, whose seminal ACO white papers are the underpinning of this Toolkit. We are grateful to Julian D. (“Bo”) Bobbitt, Jr. and Amy Poe of the Smith Anderson law firm, and to Nancy Henley, MD, Community Care of North Carolina, for compiling the information in this non-technical “blueprint” format, and the following members of The Carolinas Center for Hospice and End of Life Care for their time and expertise: Janet Bull, MD, Four Seasons; Michael Case, MD, CaroMont Health; Jonathan Fischer, MD, Duke University, and Community Care of North Carolina; Juan-Carlos Monguilod, MD, Hospice and Palliative Care of Greensboro; John Morris, MD, Four Seasons; Lana Riemann, MD, Hospice of Davidson County; Charles (Steve) Stinson, MD, Novant Health Forsyth Medical Center; and Annette Kiser, The Carolinas Center for Hospice and End of Life Care. This guide would not have been possible without the efforts of these individuals.

### ***County / Regional Medical Societies***

Cleveland County Medical Society  
Craven-Pamlico-Jones County Medical Society  
Durham-Orange County Medical Society  
Mecklenburg County Medical Society  
Forsyth-Stokes-Davie County Medical Society  
New Hanover-Pender County Medical Society  
Pitt County Medical Society  
Rutherford County Medical Society  
Western Carolina Medical Society  
Wake County Medical Society

*continued next page*

***Specialty Societies***

Carolinas Chapter, American Association of Clinical Endocrinology

North Carolina Academy of Family Physicians

North Carolina Chapter of the American College of Physicians

North Carolina College of Emergency Physicians

North Carolina Council on Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

North Carolina Dermatology Association

North Carolina Neurological Society

North Carolina Obstetrical and Gynecological Society

North Carolina Orthopaedic Association

North Carolina Pediatric Society

North Carolina Psychiatric Association

North Carolina Radiologic Society

North Carolina Society of Anesthesiologists

North Carolina Soc. of Asthma, Allergy & Clinical Immunology

North Carolina Society of Eye Physicians and Surgeons

North Carolina Society of Gastroenterology

North Carolina Society of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery

North Carolina Oncology Association

North Carolina Society of Pathologists

North Carolina Society of Plastic Surgeons

North Carolina Spine Society

North Carolina Urological Association

***State Societies / Organizations***

Community Care of North Carolina

Carolinas Center for Hospice and End of Life Care

North Carolina Academy of Physician Assistants

North Carolina Community Health Center Association

North Carolina Foundation for Advanced Health Programs

North Carolina Medical Group Managers

North Carolina Medical Society

## INTRODUCTION

This strategic guide involved input through participation by many thought leaders who have come together to form the Toward Accountable Care Consortium and Initiative. This paper would not have been possible without the generous support of all TAC Consortium member organizations, including significant support from the North Carolina Medical Society, as well as a substantial grant from The Physicians Foundation. We are grateful to Julian D. (“Bo”) Bobbitt, Jr. of the Smith Anderson law firm, who has many years of experience providing strategic counsel regarding integrated care, for compiling the information in this non-technical “blueprint” format.

Part One contains the necessary elements for a successful Accountable Care Organization (“ACO”) and implementation guidance that transcend specialty or facility and apply equally to all ACO stakeholders.

The purpose of this paper is to arm you with knowledge and confidence as you consider joining or forming an ACO.

Part Two applies the principles and processes of the Guide to provide specific strategies and practical step-by-step guidance using concrete examples used by different physician specialties, including how to apply successfully for the Medicare Shared Savings Program.





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Part One: The Physician's Accountable Care Toolkit

#### How to Identify and Build the Essential Elements of Any Successful ACO

- I. Purpose of the ACO Guide
- II. What is an ACO?
- III. Why Should I Care?
- IV. Are ACOs Really Coming?
- V. What Are the Essential Elements of a Successful ACO?
  - A. Culture of Teamwork – Integration
  - B. Primary Care Physicians
  - C. Adequate Administrative Capabilities
  - D. Financial Incentives
  - E. Health Information Technology and Data
  - F. Best Practices Across the Continuum of Care
  - G. Patient Engagement
  - H. Scale-Sufficient Patient Population
- VI. Successful Implementation – A Step-By-Step Guide
- VII. Conclusion

### Part Two: The Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

- I. Introduction
- II. Could Accountable Care Be a Good Thing for Palliative Care and Hospice Providers?

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

- III. The Recommended Approach for Developing Specialist Accountable Care Strategies
- IV. The Process Followed for Creation of this Accountable Care Guide for Hospice and Palliative Care Providers?
- V. Recommended ACO Initiatives for Hospice and Palliative Care Providers?
- VI. We've Got Some Great ACO Contributions—Now What?
- VII. What Are the Relevant Metrics?
- VIII. How Do I Ensure That the Savings Pool Distribution is Fair?
- IX. Negotiation Tips
- X. Conclusion

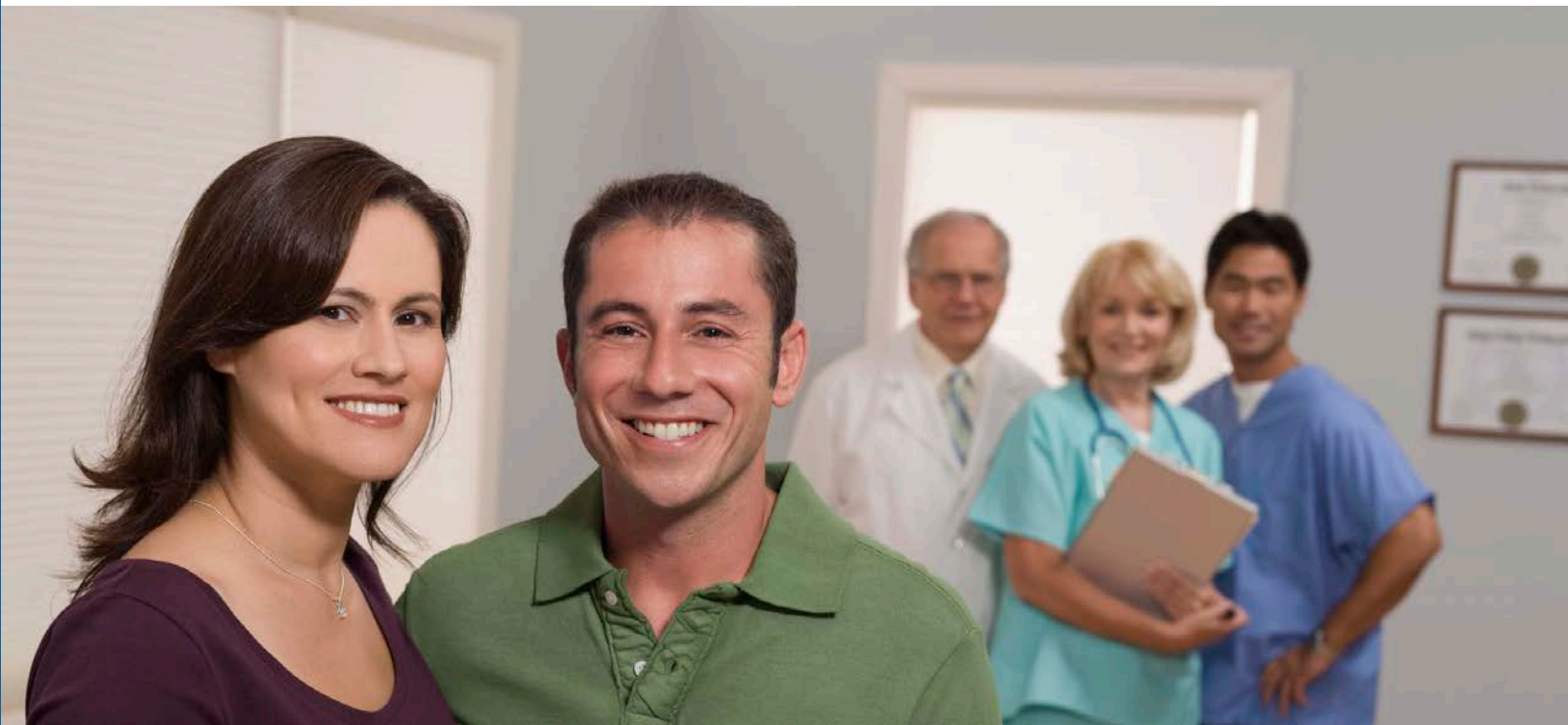
## **Part Three: Executing The Accountable Care Strategic Plan**

- I. General Strategies for all Specialties
- II. Specific Strategies for Specific Specialties



# The Physician's Accountable Care Toolkit

## How to Identify and Implement the Essential Elements for Accountable Care Organization Success



North Carolina  **Medical Society**  
*Leadership in Medicine*

 **THE PHYSICIANS FOUNDATION**  
Empowering Physicians  
Improving Healthcare

 **SMITH ANDERSON**

Toward  **Accountable Care Consortium**

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

## I. Purpose Of The Accountable Care Guide

Accountable Care Organizations (“ACOs”) are emerging as a leading model to address health care costs and fragmented care delivery. For example, in 2012, Accountable Care is being considered for implementation by virtually every private and public payor in North Carolina. It transcends federal health regulatory legislation and Medicare. The purpose of this ACO Guide is to bring together in one source a non-technical explanation of the essential elements required for any successful ACO and practical step-by-step guidance on how to achieve each element. Because a successful ACO must be “win/win”, with every collaborative participant incented and empowered to achieve their optimum value-added contribution to the enterprise, these principles transcend medical specialty, employment status, payor relationship, or facility type. This Guide works for you whether you are a primary care physician, a hospital CEO, or a specialist physician. Although ACOs are still evolving and definitive predictions are impossible at this time, the goal of the Guide is to give any reader a firm sense of the strengths and weaknesses of any ACO model they may encounter and confidence about whether to join one or to create one. There are answers to questions about who should join, who should lead, what infrastructure will work, and the phases of development to be followed.<sup>1</sup>

## II. What Is An ACO?

### A. Definitions

Former Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (“CMS”) Mark McClellan, M.D., Ph.D. described an ACO as follows: “ACOs consist of providers who are jointly held accountable for achieving measured quality improvements and reductions in the rate of spending growth. Our definition emphasizes that these cost and quality improvements must achieve overall per capita improvements in quality and cost, and that ACOs should have at least limited accountability for achieving these improvements while caring for a defined population of patients.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the National Committee for Quality Assurance (“NCQA”) included the following definition in its draft ACO criteria: “Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) are provider-based organizations that take responsibility for meeting the healthcare needs of a defined population with the goal of simultaneously improving health, improving patient experiences, and reducing per capita costs....[T]here is emerging consensus that ACOs must include a group of physicians with a strong primary care base and sufficient other specialties that support the care needs of a defined population of patients. A well-run ACO should align the clinical and financial incentives of its providers...ACOs will also need the administrative infrastructure to manage budgets, collect data, report performance, make payments related to performance, and organize providers around shared goals.”<sup>3</sup> (Emphasis added.)

Strategic Note: The part of the definition relating to patient populations represents a major shift in practice orientation, and is very alien to a typical physician’s training and day-to-day focus.

<sup>1</sup> It is not the purpose of this Guide to provide legal advice. Any person or organization considering participation in an ACO should seek the advice of legal counsel.

<sup>2</sup> Mark McClellan, Director of the Engleberg Center for Health Care Reform at the Brookings Institution, *A National Strategy to Put Accountable Care Into Practice*, Health Affairs (May 2010), p. 983.

<sup>3</sup> National Committee for Quality Assurance, *Accountable Care Organization (ACO) Draft 2011 Criteria*, p. 3. (hereinafter “NCQA”).

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

Without grasping this shift, an understanding of ACOs will remain elusive. It also is important to note what is not in the definition. No definitions specify any particular type of legal entity (i.e., IPA, PHO, employed). There is no mandatory organizational form for an ACO.

The final Medicare Shared Savings Program rule (Final Rule)<sup>4</sup> released by CMS in 2011 contains an interesting definition emphasizing structure in contrast to the ones above focusing on function: “Accountable Care Organization (ACO) means a legal entity that is recognized and authorized under applicable State law, as identified by a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN), and comprised of an eligible group (as defined at § 425.5(b)) of ACO participants that work together to manage and coordinate care for Medicare fee-for-service beneficiaries and have established a mechanism for shared governance that provides all ACO participants with an appropriate proportionate control over the ACO’s decision-making process.”<sup>5</sup>

## **B. PPACA Requirements**

ACOs eligible for the Medicaid Shared Savings Program under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010<sup>6</sup> must meet the following criteria:

- That groups of providers have established structures for reporting quality and cost of health care, leadership and management that includes clinical and administrative systems; receiving and distributing shared savings; and shared governance.
- Willing to become accountable for the quality, cost, and overall care of the Medicare fee-for-service beneficiaries assigned to it.
- Minimum three-year contract.
- Sufficient primary care providers to have at least 5,000 patients assigned.
- Processes to promote evidence-based medicine, patient engagement, and coordination of care.
- Ability to demonstrate patient-centeredness criteria, such as individualized care plans.

The Medicare Final Rule and three other related documents involving five federal agencies amplify these PPACA criteria. A special section devoted to the Medicare Shared Savings ACO Program is found in Part Two of the Toolkit.

---

<sup>4</sup> 76 Fed. Reg. 67802 (Nov. 2, 2011)

<sup>5</sup> 76 Fed. Reg. 67974

<sup>6</sup> Section 3022 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 (amends Title XVIII of the Social Security Act (42 USC 1395 *et seq.*)).

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

## C. How Is It Different From a Medical Home?

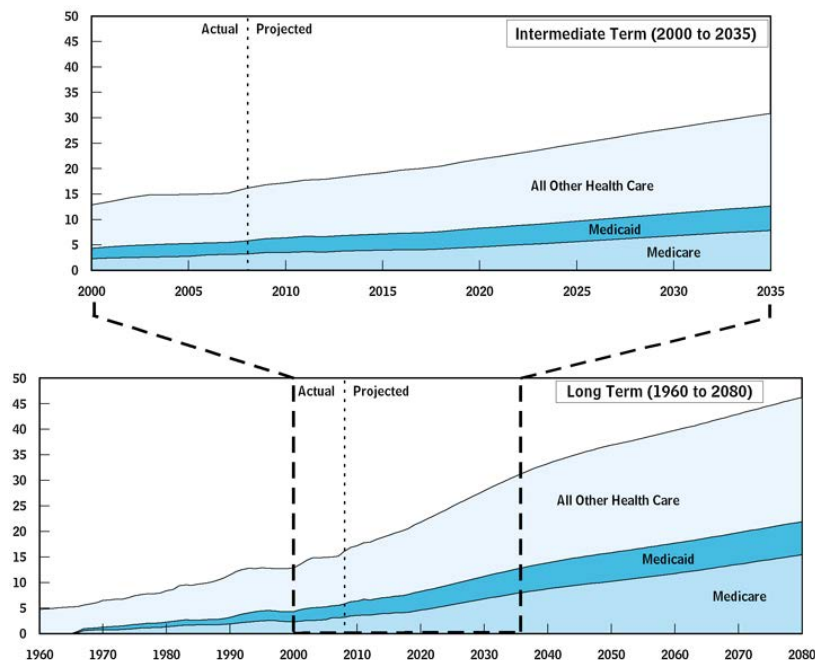
The Patient-Centered Medical Home (“Medical Home”) emphasizes strengthening and empowering primary care to coordinate care for patients across the continuum of care. It is complimentary to the ACO and can become the core of an ACO, but it is different in two main respects: (1) Financial Incentives - The Medical Home lacks the shared accountability feature in that it does not have financial incentives, such as shared savings, motivating providers to work together to deliver the highest quality care at the lowest cost with the greatest patient satisfaction. (2) Specialists/ Hospital Linkage - Even though there are Medical Home-only ACOs, a typical ACO is also different from a Medical Home in that it tends to have relationships with select specialists and hospitals across the full continuum of care for the targeted initiative.

## III. Why Should I Care?

Health spending is unsustainable, even before coverage expansion of the 2010 federal health reforms. With 19% of Gross Domestic Product (“GDP”) being the rough estimate of the amount the United States can collect in taxes and other revenues, by 2035, Medicare and Medicaid are predicted to consume 13% of GDP and health care costs will consume 31% of GDP. In other words, health care alone will cost well over all we collect. By 2080, absent drastic change, Medicaid and Medicare will consume all of our tax and other revenues, and total health spending will claim 46% of GDP. The rest, defense, education, roads, etc. we can only pay for by borrowing. President Obama is the first President facing bankruptcy of the Medicare System during a term in office.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

## Total Spending for Health Care Under the Congressional Budget Office's Extended Baseline Scenario



There is consensus that much of this is avoidable. The now-famous New Yorker article by Dr. Atul Gawande showing Medicare spending to be twice as high in McAllen, Texas as in El Paso, became required reading in the White House. It said: “The real puzzle of American Healthcare... is not why McAllen is different from El Paso. It’s why El Paso isn’t like McAllen. Every incentive in the system is an invitation to go the way McAllen has gone.”<sup>7</sup>



Article By Influential Writer Sparks Strong Debate

The Congressional Budget Office Report on the ACO's predecessor, the Bonus-Eligible Organization, includes this rationale: “[P]roviders have a financial incentive to provide higher-intensity care in greater volume, which contributes to the fragmented delivery of care that currently exists.”

<sup>7</sup> Atul Gawande, *The Cost Conundrum*, *The New Yorker* (June 1, 2009)

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

These dysfunctions in our current system, for which the ACO is seen as a partial remedy, have been given much of the blame for our country's health care system costing 50% more as a percentage of GDP than any other in the world but ranking only 37th in overall health and 50th in life expectancy.<sup>8</sup>

Because of the crisis, drastic efforts at health care cost reform seem inevitable. President Obama stated it bluntly: "So let me be clear: If we do not control these costs, we will not be able to control the deficit."<sup>9</sup> Private insurers see it, too. The President of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina recently stated: "Even if federal health overhaul is rejected by the Supreme Court or revamped by Congress, the market must continue to change. The system that brought us to this place is unsustainable. Employers who foot the bill for workers' health coverage are demanding that Blue Cross identify the providers with the highest quality outcomes and lowest costs."<sup>10</sup>

Flattening the cost curve is possible through the ACO's marketplace incentives without rationing care, imposing new taxes, or cutting provider reimbursement. Doing nothing is not an option, and all these alternatives appear unacceptable. In short, there is no "Plan B."

## **IV. Are ACOs Really Coming?**

### **A. If They Repeal Health Reform, Won't This Go Away?**

No. Federal health reform has three prongs: Expand Coverage (individual and employer mandates, no pre-existing condition exclusions, etc.), Fraud Control, and Waste Controls (ACOs, bundled payments, value-based purchasing, CMS Innovation Center, etc.). Many experts think that expanding coverage into our broken system has made health care even more unsustainable. However, as noted, the cost curves, even without health reform, will bankrupt our resources, and the value-based reimbursement movement was well underway before the federal legislation was passed. Increasing awareness of problems with the fee-for-service system has resulted in a growing number of initiatives that have common features of accountability at the medical community level, transparency to the public, flexibility to match local strengths to value-enhancement opportunities, and shifting to paying for value, not volume.

### **B. Isn't This Capitation Revisited?**

You may fairly ask, "Isn't this the 'next big thing' to save health care, like capitation? Won't it fizzle away like that did?"

ACOs with shared savings are unlike capitation in several crucial ways. First, the payments are commonly only bonus payments in addition to fee for service payments.

---

<sup>8</sup> World Health Organization, *World Health Statistics* 2009.

<sup>9</sup> President Barack Obama, interview excerpt, July 23, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Brad Wilson, President of BlueCross BlueShield of North Carolina, *The News & Observer* (January 29, 2011).

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

In the shared savings only models, there is no downside risk. Second, vital administrative capabilities, data measurement capability, identified common metrics, severity adjustment, and electronic health information exchange sophistication were not present in the capitation era.

**Strategic Note:** Though many experts propose that newly-formed ACOs assume financial risk through financial penalties, or partial or whole capitation, the 15 years clinical integration experience of this author strongly suggests that ACOs TRY NOT TO ACCEPT DOWNSIDE RISK UNTIL THEY HAVE THREE CONSECUTIVE YEARS OF MEETING BUDGET ESTIMATES.<sup>11</sup> There are just too many new partners, roles, moving parts, untested data metrics, and variables beyond the control of the ACO. Even taking a smaller share of the savings pool to recognize the absence of downside risk is preferred to accepting the responsibility of unanticipated medical expenses without the tools to control them. Having some “skin in the game” is clearly a logical way to incentivize accountability for providing value, but thrusting that on an unready health care system could do more harm than good.

## C. Can't I Wait Until Things Get Clearer?

With hospitals and physicians having lots of other things on their plates and this bearing a resemblance to other reforms that never quite panned out, a wait-and-see attitude might at first seem reasonable. However, as the next chapter describes, successful ACO creation will require deep transformational change. The changes will have less to do with infrastructure and technology than culture. This is equally true in integrated systems with a fully-employed medical staff, as it is with other models. “Given the major cultural differences between hospitals and physicians, achieving clinical integration is one of the most difficult challenges that either party will ever undertake...Organizations that have not yet started down this path in earnest will need to move much more aggressively to prepare for the post fee-for-service world.”<sup>12</sup> You cannot wait to plan. Being unprepared is not an option. But there is a difference between having a plan and implementing a plan. If you are a hospital CEO or in a particular specialty you may want to wait until value-based reimbursement has reached the tipping point relative to fee for service before you “pull the trigger” in implementing your plan.

## V. What Are The Essential Elements Of A Successful ACO?

There are eight essential elements of any successful ACO. All eight are required. You cannot skip a step. Because element one is not as objectively verifiable, it is very counterintuitive that the most vital element is by far the most difficult element to obtain will be creation of an interdependent culture of mutual accountability committed to higher quality and patient satisfaction at the lowest cost. “[C]linical transformation has less to do with technical capabilities and more with the ability to effect cultural change.”<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> The Final Rule was substantially revised from the proposed regulations in that a new ACO had the option in the first term of the MSSP not to accept risk, whereas under the proposed regulations CMS would mandate acceptance of risk for the third year of the initial three-year contract. 76 Fed. Reg. 19643.

<sup>12</sup> Gary Edmiston and David Wofford, *Physician Alignment: The Right Strategy; the Right Mindset*, Healthcare Financial Management Association (December 1, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

## The Eight Essential Elements of a Successful ACO



### A. Essential Element No. 1: Culture of Teamwork – Integration



The most important element, yet the one most difficult to attain, is a team-oriented culture with a deeply-held shared commitment to reorganize care to achieve higher quality at lower cost. A fully-functional ACO will catalyze the transformation of health delivery. “While strong hospital-physician alignment has always been a cornerstone of success, the necessary degree of future collaboration, partnership, and risk-sharing will dwarf what has come before it. Hospitals and physicians will have to recognize, embrace, and leverage their growing interdependence to create organizational structures and incentive models that are strategically aligned and mutually rewarding.”<sup>14</sup>

1. **Challenges for Physicians.** Physician attitudes favor autonomy and individualism over collaboration. These attitudes are inculcated in clinical training and reinforced daily in care delivery. Reimbursement rewards an individualistic “eat what you kill” mentality. Physicians need to understand that the level of involvement needed to effect changes in quality and cost is much different than just banding together for contracting purposes. Physicians will have to be willing to change utilization, referral, and care-management patterns. In many settings, specialists will need to release primary control of patient care decision-making to the Medical Home primary care physician.

<sup>14</sup> *Toward Accountable Care*, The Advisory Board Company (2010).



# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

Physicians are justifiably cynical about prior “next best things,” such as HMOs, gate-keeping, and capitation, and have little experience with, or time for, organizational-level strategic planning. But, “[I]f providers do not change their decision-making and behavior, ACOs will go the way of most PHOs and IPAs...to the bone yard. More importantly, the healthcare crisis will persist, and more drastic solutions will be mandated.”<sup>15</sup>

**2. Challenges for Hospitals.** Will hospitals be willing to embrace a true ACO structure, which will likely drive down hospitalization? Will they be willing to distribute shared savings as intended, to incentivize and reward those who created it through high-performance care delivery and improved coordination, or will they try to take any savings dollars “off the top” to make up for the lost revenue from the reduction in avoidable hospitalizations and readmissions? Will the increased market share from joining an ACO make up for the lost revenue? Exacerbating these business risks for sharing governance with physicians and committing without reservation to an orientation of higher quality and lower costs, is a deeper cultural barrier: control. Hospitals are complex organizations, and a degree of control over operations and direction has been historically important for their viability.

**“The most significant challenge of becoming accountable is not forming an organization, it is forging one.”<sup>16</sup>**

**Strategic Note:** Tips on How to Create a Collaborative Culture:

- **Champions.** Vision comes first, but to sell that vision, you need physician leaders able to articulate a clear and compelling vision of change. They need to be champions of the transformational changes needed. As few as one, and rarely more than five, are needed. If a hospital is involved, the CEO needs to show commitment to the shared vision.
- **Governance Structure.** The structure must have meaningful input from the various parties to have status and credibility. It must exhibit shared control. Management teams can be pairings of physicians with hospital administrators. As noted, shared governance is such a point of emphasis that the Final Rule includes that phrase in the definition of “Accountable Care Organization.”<sup>17</sup>
- **Incentives Drive Alignment.** “[I]f incentives are correctly aligned, organic innovations to solve other problems can and will engage.... Anticipated early versions of ACO payment incentives are likely to be directionally correct but unlikely to be sufficient to create the needed burning platform.”<sup>18</sup> Compensation plans for hospital-employed physicians must not be limited to individual productivity, but also have incentives for accountability for success of the ACO team.

---

<sup>15</sup> Phillip L. Roning, *Becoming Accountable*, HFMA Compendium—Contemplating the ACO Opportunity, Appendix (November 2010), p. 40.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> 76 Fed. Reg. 67974.

<sup>18</sup> Ann Robinow, *Accountable Care News*, The Top 3 Obstacles to ACO Implementation, (December 2010).

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

- **“Spiral of Success.”** The following strategy could help meld team culture: An early pilot project for your ACO should be consistent with the new vision, led by champions and cut across specialty and department lines. A multi-disciplinary team decides how to collect and share data in new ways to facilitate this care initiative. The data, in paper or electronic format, is available at the point of care. Quality goes up and there is a savings pool. New team habits begin to emerge. Small scale is OK, but it must succeed, so the “spiral of success” can start. Trust goes up and buy-in for the next collaboration will occur more quickly.
- **Employment Not a Panacea.** Isn't the most obvious path to integration through hospital employment? This is a feasible approach if the parties have worked together in the past and there is a pre-existing level of trust and respect. This will not work if there are not shared goals and the control and financial incentive issues are not resolved. “Current trends in physician employment represent neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for true integration; value-added integration does not necessarily require large-scale physician employment and simply signing contracts does not ensure progress toward more effective care coordination.”<sup>19</sup>

## B. Essential Element No. 2: Primary Care Physicians



1. **What Is the Role of Primary Care In ACOs?** As discussed in detail in Section V.G. below, the highest-impact targets identified for ACOs lie in the following areas: (a) prevention and wellness; (b) chronic disease management; (c) reduced hospitalizations; (d) improved care transitions across the current fragmented system; and (e) multi-specialty co-management of complex patients. Primary care can be drivers in all of these categories.

Harold Miller of the Center for Healthcare Quality and Payment Reform concluded, “it seems clear that, in order to be accountable for the health and healthcare of a broad population of patients, an Accountable Care Organization must have one or more primary care practices playing a central role.”<sup>20</sup> He envisions different levels of ACOs, with the core Level One consisting primarily of primary care practices. Level Two would include select specialists and potentially hospitals. As the diverse patient populations are included, Level Three expands to more specialists and facilities, and Level Four includes public health and community social services. As noted, primary care is the only provider or health care facility mandated for inclusion to qualify for PPACA's ACO Shared Savings Program.

---

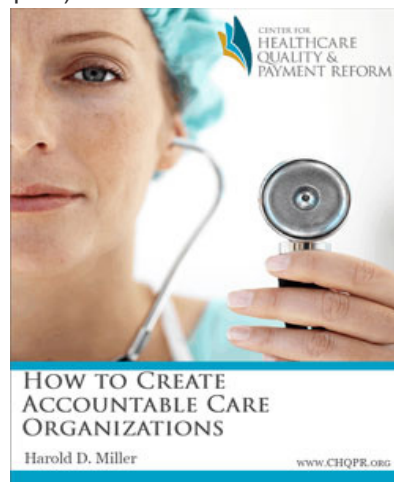
<sup>19</sup> *Toward Accountable Care*, The Advisory Board Company (2010).

<sup>20</sup> Harold D. Miller, *How to Create Accountable Care Organizations*, Center for Healthcare Quality and Payment Reform, p. 8, (September 2009).

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

2. **What Are the Roles of Specialists In ACOs?** It is becoming clear that specialists are going to serve important roles in ACOs. Given the opportunities for ACOs listed in Section V.B.1. above, specialists should see roles in Medical Home coordination on diagnosis and treatment, transitions across settings, reducing avoidable hospitalizations, and in multi-specialty complex patient management. Inpatient specialists can tackle hospital through-put, minimizing avoidable adverse events and readmissions, and quality improvements. Specialists intent on preserving volume at the expense of best practices have no role in an ACO.

3. **What Are the Roles of Hospitals In ACOs?** Hospitals are logical ACO partners for several reasons: Patients will need hospitalization, hospitals have extensive administrative and HIT infrastructure, ACOs are consistent with their missions, and hospitals are often a medical community's natural organizational hub. But the typical ACOs tend to reduce hospitalizations. As Mr. Miller observes, "the interests of primary care physicians and hospitals in many communities will not only be unaligned, but will be in opposition to one another."<sup>21</sup> A litmus test for hospital membership (or whether to join an ACO that includes a hospital) is whether it is committed to overall increased savings, improved quality, and improved patient satisfaction for patient populations, even if hospitalization rates are reduced. It is also unacceptable if a hospital permanently seeks to capture most of the shared savings "off the top" to make up for lost revenue. A hospital at over-capacity should not have this conflict. Moreover, many hospitals see full institutional commitment to accountable care as the best way to prepare for the future, maximize their fair share of the shared savings dollar, and grow market share. Once the tipping point of the shift from payment for volume to payment for value has been reached, these conflicts should dissolve.



In summary, because primary care will drive so many of an ACO's most high-yielding initiatives, it is an essential element of a lasting and successful ACO. "Accountable care absolutely must be about improving and maintaining the health of a population of patients and not just controlling costs. It must be about proactive and preventive care and not reactive care. It must be about outcomes and not volume or processes. It must be about leveraging the value of primary care and the elements of the Patient-Centered Medical Home."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Terry McGeeney, M.D., *The Patient-Centered Medical Home and the Accountable Care Organization*, <http://transformed.com/CEORports/PCMH-and-ACO.cfm>, (2010).

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

## C. Essential Element No. 3: Adequate Administrative Capabilities



What Kind of Organization Can Be an ACO? The very label “accountable care organization” tends to convey an impression that an ACO must be a particular type of organization. In retrospect, it probably should have been called “Accountable Care System.” **It is about function, not form.** The NCQA’s ACO criteria look to core competencies and infrastructure to implement them, but are “agnostic to organizational structure (i.e., whether or not it is led by a multi-specialty group, hospital, or independent practice association).”<sup>23</sup> Similarly, a wide array of organizations may become eligible for CMS Shared Savings Program under PPACA and the Final Rule:<sup>24</sup> group practice arrangements, networks of practices, joint ventures between providers and hospitals, hospitals employing providers, and other approved structures. There are three essential infrastructure functional capabilities: (1) performance measurement, (2) financial administration, and (3) clinical direction. A legal entity of some sort is necessary, and a number of choices are available. The form ultimately chosen should be driven by what most readily facilitates achievement of the functional needs of the ACO initiatives in your community. The ultimate goals of accountable care are to improve patient outcomes and patient satisfaction while also achieving greater cost efficiencies. The key to achieving this goal is enhanced coordination of care among diverse providers through the application of evidence-based clinical protocols and transparent measurement and reporting. **“While ACO formation and ongoing structural, operational, and legal issues related to ACOs are important, it is this transformation in clinical care that must remain the overriding focus of ACO development.”**<sup>25</sup>

What Are Key Legal Issues Affecting ACOs? ACOs require collaboration, referrals, reductions in unnecessary care, and sharing of revenues among sometime competitors. All of these characteristics, and more, in furtherance of health policy, also happen to raise a number of challenging legal-compliance issues for a body of state and federal health care law largely premised upon the fee-for-service model. Adaptations of the most problematic laws and regulations are underway. On October 20, 2011, the Departments of Health and Human Services, Treasury, and Justice, and the Federal Trade Commission jointly released federal policies concerning implementing the MSSP in order to provide guidance. A properly configured ACO should be successful in navigating this legal minefield. The principal bodies of law affecting ACOs are:

- Antitrust
- Anti-kickback
- Stark
- Civil Monetary Penalties Law

---

<sup>23</sup> NCQA, pp. 7-8.

<sup>24</sup> 76 Fed. Reg. 67975.

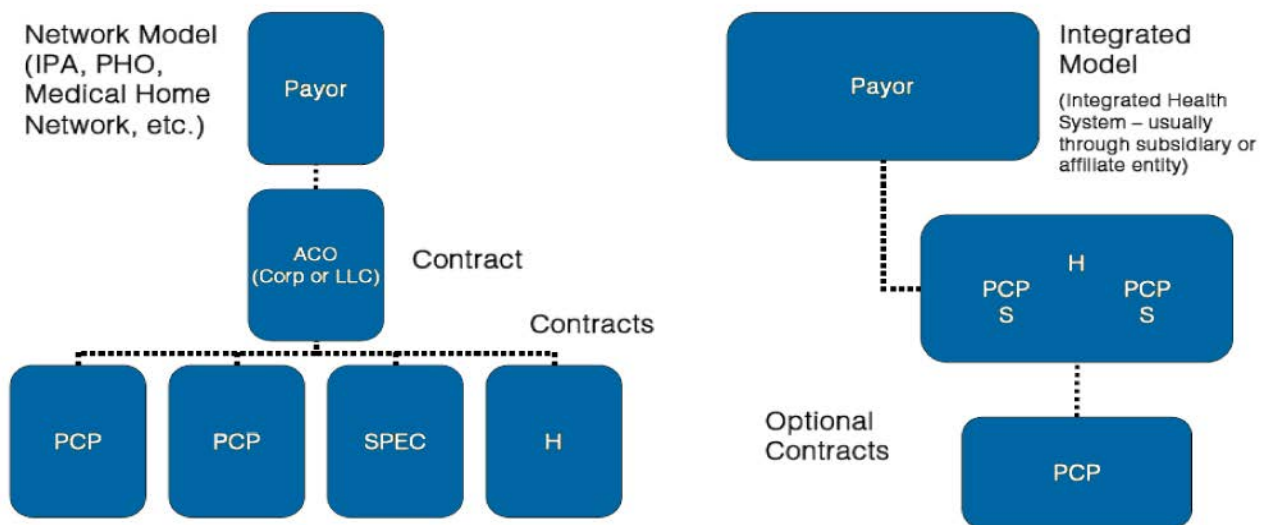
<sup>25</sup> Doug Hastings, Accountable Care News (December 2010), p. 6.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

- Tax
- HIPAA
- Malpractice
- Corporate Practice of Medicine
- Insurance
- Intellectual Property
- State Self-Referral Laws
- Business Law

For a detailed legal analysis, please review the “Accountable Care Legal Guide.”

## Possible Organizational Forms



### 1. Network Model

a. **Independent Practice Associations (“IPAs”)** – An IPA is basically an umbrella legal entity, usually an LLC, for-profit corporation or nonprofit organization, with physician participation contracts with hospital-employed and independent physician practices. Payors contract with the IPA. These structures became familiar in the fee-for-service and capitation eras, and the form is still suitable for the accountable care era. However, the IPA now needs to have ACO-level infrastructure as described in this Guide. It is particularly dependent on robust health information exchange, as the continuum of care is more “virtual” because the providers are independent. The

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

participation agreements are different, too. The provider agrees to undertake the responsibilities agreed upon by the ACO and accept some type of performance-based incentive, like shared savings, in addition to fee-for-service. It can have any combination of specialists, primary care, hospital, and tertiary care participating contracts. An IPA is owned by physicians. Legal issues of note in IPAs involve antitrust, self-referral, insurance regulation, HIPAA, malpractice, and the Stark law.

b. **Physician/Hospital Organization (“PHO”)** – The PHO is very similar to an IPA, but the main difference is that it is co-owned and governed by physicians and a hospital or health system and includes a hospital participation contract. The same requirements and caveats apply.

c. **Medical Home-Centric Model** – Under this variation, an umbrella entity is owned by Medical Home practice members or networks. It contracts with payors, initially for the medical-home-related primary care services, but includes accountable care financial arrangements and performance measurement capabilities. It broadens the scope of initiatives and patient populations by adding select specialists and hospitals through contractual arrangements. These may be sub-ACO arrangements whereby the contract is with a PHO or hospital ACO. The same requirements and caveats of the other Network Model forms apply. Community Care of North Carolina is an example of a statewide confederation of 14 Medical Home-Centric Networks.

2. **Integrated ACO Structure** – With this variation, the hospital, health system, foundation, or multi-specialty clinic employs, rather than contracts with, the physician. It may own, capitalize, and control the ACO, with physicians on advisory committees. The HIT and other infrastructure is within the controlling entity. It may have contracts with independent providers and facilities if necessary to round out the breadth, depth, and reach of services needed to accomplish its initiatives.

## D. **Essential Element No. 4: Adequate Financial Incentives**



1. **Isn’t This the Same As Insurance?** No. An insurance company assumes the financial risk of whether a person gets ill or has an accident requiring medical care. Accountable care risk is accountability for higher performance treatment of patients once they become ill. This gets fuzzy when one remembers that the ACO will be responsible for an entire patient population, especially as it assumes more risk, as in full capitation. However, this distinction is why the ACO performance expectations need to be severity-adjusted.

2. **What Are the Types of Financial Incentive Models for ACOs?** There are three tiers: upside-bonus-only shared savings; a hybrid of limited-upside and limited-downside shared savings and penalty; and full-upside and full-downside capitation.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care



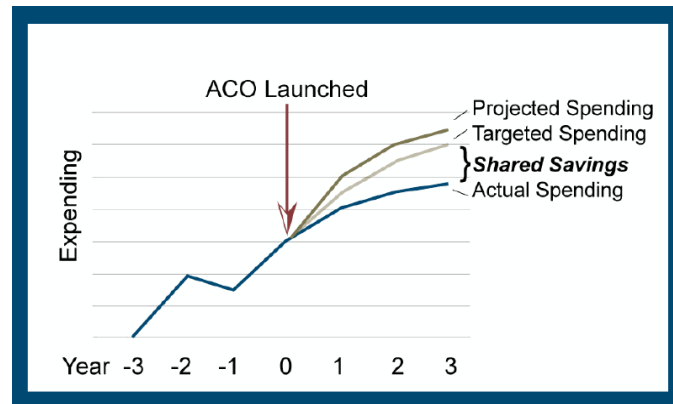
a. **Shared Savings** – If quality and patient satisfaction are enhanced or maintained and there are savings relative to the predicted costs for the assigned patient population, then a portion (commonly 50% according to some surveys and the MSSP Final Rule) of those savings is shared with the ACO. This is stacked on top of the provider’s fee-for-service payments. To maximize incentivization, the savings pool should be divided in proportion to the level of contribution of each ACO participant. This aligns incentives of all ACO participants to keep patients as well as possible, and if ill, to receive optimum care in a team environment across the care continuum. If primary care has especially high medical home management responsibility, this may be accompanied by the addition of a flat per member/per month payment.

Some of the savings pool distributions should be used to maintain the ACO infrastructure, but as much as possible should go to reward providers and facilities for the extra time and attention devoted to patient management and technology investments. As mentioned, it should not go to pay affected physicians or hospitals for reduced revenues under fee-for-service for reductions in volume.

A strength of this model is that it is easy to understand and transition to, since it builds upon the familiar fee-for-service system. That is also its weakness, since fee-for-service still rewards volume, not value. This shared savings model has been criticized as being “asymmetric” or “one-sided,” with no consequence if there are higher costs or no care improvement. Another problem is that there is by necessity a lag time to measure the “delta,” or the difference between the actual costs and the expected costs, so the ACO is uncertain whether there will be revenues. The delay saps the incentivization to adhere to the ACO’s best practices and coordination.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

The Shared Savings Model



\*Courtesy of the Brookings Institution

**Strategic Note 1:** How to Calculate Shared Savings. Although the concept is simple – the ACO gets 50% of the difference between what the costs for the population turned out to be versus what the costs would have been if the ACO were not in place – DO NOT try to do this by comparing your population costs year-to-year. It might work the first year, but will be inappropriate after that. Having to beat your performance from the prior year, every year, is like calling an Olympic medalist a failure if she does not break her world record the next time out. In some CMS demonstration projects, relatively unmanaged counties in other parts of the country were picked as the control populations. Another way that works is to use an actuary that can predict the medical costs for your region or comparable community and use that actuarially valid projected amount as your unmanaged “comparable.” A variation of this latter approach has been chosen by CMS for calculation of the MSSP savings.<sup>26</sup>

**Strategic Note 2:** Be Patient Before Taking on Risk. Do not repeat the disaster of the '90s, when providers took on risk without proper technology, infrastructure, best practices, or experience. We recommend that you come within 5% ± of your predicted costs for three consecutive years before leaving the shared-savings upside-only model. You may have unexpected costs over which you have no control. You will likely want to improve your Health Information Exchange, include relevant data elements, and see which of your ACO providers “get it.” In our experience, fears are overblown that lack of downside risk will deter performance improvement. To the contrary, a meaningful bonus payment is very motivating, as much as a recognition of and respect for the clinical leadership of the physicians as it is for the benefit of dollars involved. Individual distributions that differ based on performance determined by peers is also a “grade” that high-achieving individuals work hard to earn.

<sup>26</sup> 76 Fed. Reg. 67985-67988.



# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

b. **Savings Bonus Plus Penalty** – As with the shared savings model, providers receive shared savings for managing costs and hitting quality and satisfaction benchmarks, but also will be liable for expenses that exceed spending targets. This model is called “symmetric” or “two-sided” and the bonus potential is increased to balance the accountability for exceeding pre-set goals. Fee-for-service is retained. This resembles the “two-sided” model mentioned in the Final Rule.<sup>27</sup>

c. **Capitation** – A range of partial capitation and full capitation models are possible. Fee-for-service payments are replaced by flat payments plus potential bonuses and penalties. Only seasoned and truly clinically integrated ACOs should attempt this level of risk. Yes, the upside is higher, but the disasters of the '90s should not be forgotten.

3. **Is This the Same as Bundled Payment or Episode of Care Payment?** ACO incentives can be aligned with these and other payment experiments under consideration. An “episode of care” is a single amount to cover all the services provided to a patient during a single episode of care. When that episode payment covers providers who would have been paid separately under fee-for-service, that is a “bundled payment.” Such a payment mechanism that excludes payment for treatment of avoidable readmission or hospital-acquired infections motivates better care. These approaches do not incentivize prevention and medical-home coordination to avoid the episode in the first place.

4. **“Meaningful Use” Regulations Incentives.** We include the “Meaningful Use” payments as an ACO financial incentive because the basic Health Information Exchange within your ACO will likely qualify the ACO’s providers for the Phase Two and Phase Three “Meaningful Use” incentives.<sup>28</sup> If your ACO can go ahead and establish its data flow needs relatively soon as outlined in this ACO Guide, you stand a good chance that the federal government will help finance the ACO’s HIT needs. See Section V.E. below for more detail.

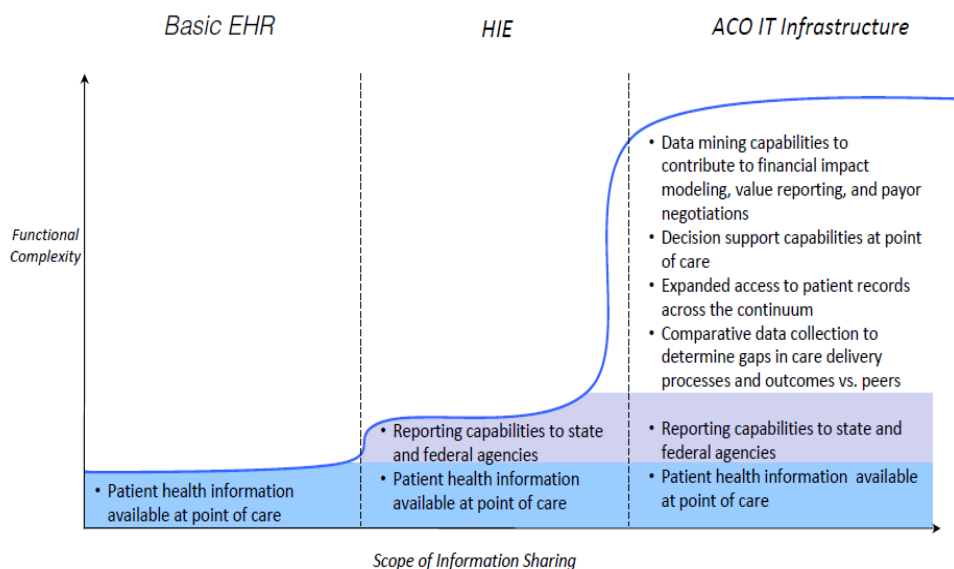
---

<sup>27</sup> 76 Fed. Reg. 67986-67987.

<sup>28</sup> 75 Fed. Reg. 44314 (July 28, 2010).

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

## E. Essential Element No. 5: Health Information Technology and Data



1. **What Data?** ACO data is usually a combination of quality, efficiency, and patient-satisfaction measures. It will usually have outcomes and process measures. Nationally-accepted benchmarks are emerging. There are three categories of data needs for an ACO:

a. **Baseline Data** – This is often overlooked. To compare anything, there needs to be a beginning reference point. Can you collect costs and quality data? Who owns it now? Who collects it? Do you trust them to be accurate and objective? Use it to perform a “gap analysis”: Where are your local quality and cost numbers outliers to the ideal? This tells you where your “low-hanging” fruit may be. Match those outlier opportunity areas with the particular strengths of the provider array of your ACO and you have your prioritized initiatives or targets.

b. **Performance Data** – In the value-based reimbursement era, it will not be enough to provide exceptional cost-effective care; you must prove it. A practical way to determine your ACO’s needed performance data is to start by selecting the ACO’s targeted initiative as mentioned above. Then select from emerging nationally recognized quality and efficiency metrics, if they apply. Even if they do apply, convene a multi-specialty committee of clinicians to vet their clinical validity. This committee will recommend performance benchmarks from scratch if national standards are not yet available for all of the care pathways of your initiative. They should address quality, patient satisfaction, and efficiency. They need to be severity-adjusted. Obviously, if and when a third-party payor, including CMS, sets the performance benchmarks, they should be part of the performance array. Many payors want to allow local flexibility and clinical leadership in metric-setting.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

Who collects the data? Are there variables outside of your control affecting your performance scores (i.e., patient non-compliance)? What financial incentives/penalties are tied to each?

c. **Data As a Clinical Tool** – Once the ACO targeted care initiatives are selected, the best practices across the care continuum will be determined. The appropriate ACO committee will then usually “blow up” each pathway into each component and assign clinical leadership, decision support, data prompts, and embed relevant clinical data into each step at the point-of-care. ACOs are discussing virtual workstations and data dashboards. Coordination with downstream providers will be optimized with the real-time sharing of upstream care results and scheduling.

**Strategic Notes:** (1) The ACO should periodically internally grade itself against the performance benchmarks to create a constant quality/efficiency/satisfaction improvement loop. This not only will hone the contributions of the ACO initiatives, but also will prepare it to increase its financial rewards once the performance results drive a savings pool or bundled payments. Gaps in care should be flagged and addressed before your compensation depends on it. Clearly, clinically valid, accurately collected, severity-adjusted, and properly benchmarked data are essential for any compensation model based on performance. (2) Data that reflects a track record of high performance serves as a bargaining tool when reimbursement is being negotiated, even in fee-for-service. (3) Use data first to target the “low-hanging fruit,” high-impact, value-add initiatives in your area best suited to your specialty or facility. Next, use data to collect evidence of your performance. There will be specific baseline, performance, and clinical data elements needed for each participant to meet objectives, maximize their measured contribution, and thus reap a meaningful reward from the savings pool.

d. **The MSSP Final Rule Provides Details** – Down from 65 in the Proposed Rule, the Final Rule requires reporting on 33 measures across your domains: patient/caregiver experience; care coordination; patient safety; preventative health; and at-risk population/frail elderly health. The goals of measure setting include seeking a mix of standards, processes, outcomes, and patient experience measures, severity adjusted and, to the extent practicable, nationally endorsed by a stakeholder organization.

e. **HIE Capability** – Your ACO will need Health Information Exchange (“HIE”) capabilities sufficient to move this data across the continuum in a meaningful way. This HIE is aligned with the Meaningful Use regulations. It will need to be able to aggregate data from multiple sources into user-friendly formats with decision support and relevant data that follows the patient to maximize chances of success in the ACO’s targeted initiatives. It needs to minimize the data collection burden on workflows.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

## F. Essential Element No. 6: Best Practices Across the Continuum of Care



Another essential element of a successful ACO is the ability to translate evidence-based medical principles into actionable best practices across the continuum of care for the selected targeted initiative or initiatives. An ACO may start out with a single patient population (i.e., morbidly obese patients) or disease-state (i.e., diabetes).

The five identified high-impact target areas for ACO initiatives are:

- Prevention and wellness;
- Chronic disease (75% of all U.S. health care spending, much of it preventable);
- Reduced hospitalizations;
- Care transitions (across our fragmented system); and
- Multi-specialty care coordination of complex patients.

“The best bet for achieving returns from integration is to prioritize initiatives specifically targeting waste and inefficiency caused by fragmentation in today’s delivery system, unnecessary spending relating to substandard clinical coordination, aggravated with the complexity of navigating episodes of care, and unwanted variations in clinical outcomes driven by lack of adherence to best clinical practice.”<sup>29</sup>

As discussed earlier in Section V.B., the richest “target fields” from this array will vary by specialty and type of facility. Looking at these suggested initiatives, it is no wonder why primary care is emphasized as key for ACOs, since they could play a significant role in every area. The ACO should match its strengths against the gaps in care in the ACO’s market to find the proverbial “low-hanging fruit.”

## G. Essential Element No. 7: Patient Engagement



Patient engagement is another essential element. Without it, an ACO will not fully meet its potential. Unfortunately, many of today’s health care consumers erroneously believe that more is better, especially when they are not “paying” for it, insurance is. Patient noncompliance is a problem, especially regarding chronic diseases and lifestyle management. It is difficult to accept a compensation model based on input on improved patient population health when that is dramatically affected by a variable outside of your control, patient adherence. Currently, asking a patient to be a steward of his or her own care puts a fee-for-service payor at a competitive disadvantage. But patient engagement is part of patient-centeredness, which is required by PPACA for an ACO to qualify for CMS’ Shared Savings Program.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Toward Accountable Care*, The Advisory Board Company (2010)

<sup>30</sup> Section 3022 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 (42 U.S.C. §§ 1395, et seq.). See also 76 Fed. Reg. 67976.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

## What Can an ACO Do to Engage Patients?

Better information at a societal level and also at the medical home point of care.

- **The Patient Compact** – Some ACOs, such as the Geisinger Clinic, engage the patient through a compact, or agreement. It may involve a written commitment by the patient to be responsible for his or her own wellness or chronic care management, coupled with rewards for so doing, education, tools, self-care modules, and shared decision-making empowerment. The providers will need to embrace the importance of patient involvement and hold up their end of the engagement bargain.
- **Benefit Differentials for Lifestyle Choices** – The financial impact of many volitional patient lifestyle choices is actuarially measurable. A logical consequence of the patient choice could be a benefit or financial differential reflecting at least partially these avoidable health care costs.

## H. Essential Element No. 8: Scale-Sufficient Patient Population



It is OK, even desirable, to start small; to “walk before you run,” so to speak. However, it is often overlooked that there needs to be a minimal critical mass of patients to justify the time and infrastructure investment for the ACO. PPACA’s Shared Savings Program requires that the ACO have a minimum of 5,000 beneficiaries assigned to it.

**Strategic Note:** Some ACOs commence activities through a single pilot, or demonstration project, without a sustainable patient population scale. It can de-bug the initiative and test-run the ACO early enough to fix problems before ramping up. This must succeed, however. If it does, it will be much easier for the ACO champions to gain buy-in from others.



# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care



The elements do come together and mesh. Culture dominates. Each one can be built. These are not mysterious. They are doable. It will be hard. Once the ACO organizers embrace the opportunity in this change, achieving all of the elements for sustainable success is quite feasible. In addition, if you are evaluating a previously organized ACO, there are clear indicators regarding these essential elements that will predict reliably its likelihood of success.

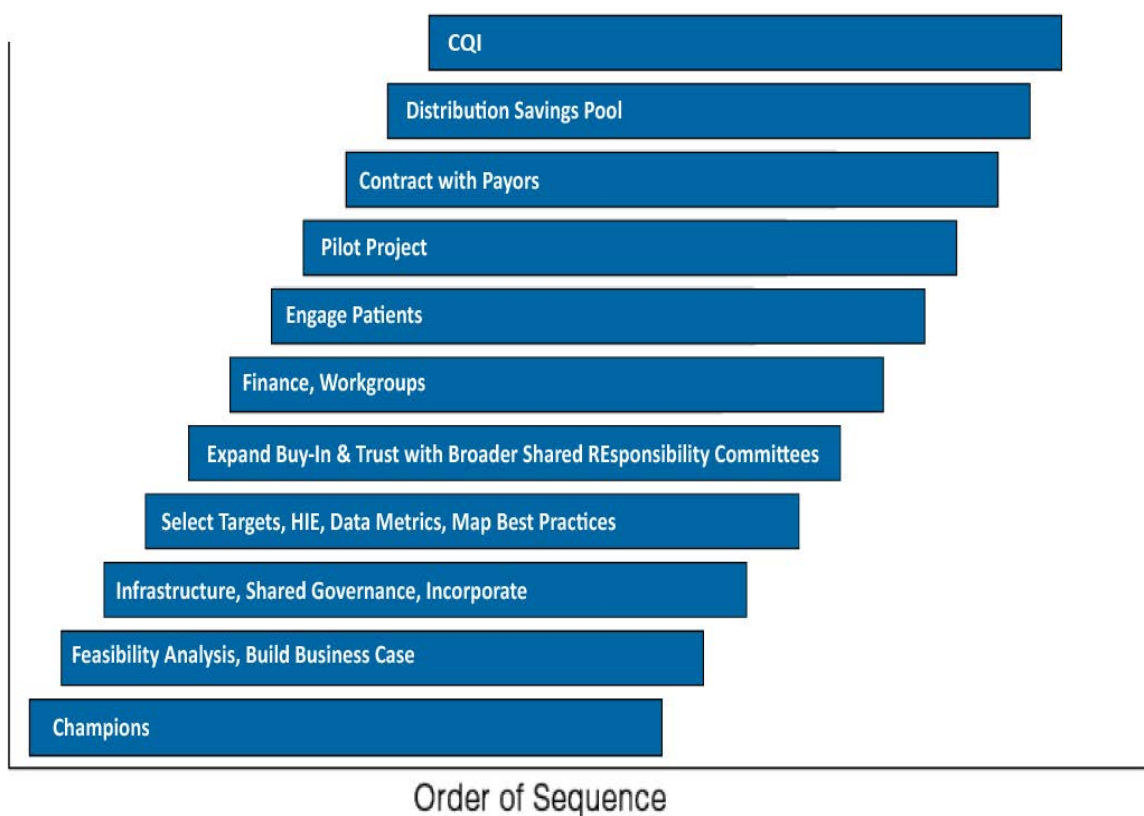
# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

## VI. Successful Implementation – A Step-By-Step Guide

### A. Where Do I Start?

OK, you now may be saying: “I know what an ACO is, why it is important, and how to identify ones that will succeed. However, how do I build one? Where do I start? I know where I need to go now, but how do I get there?” The creation of an ACO follows basic business planning and start-up principles. Expert advice on ACO development is uniform. The following is a step-by-step guide to building an ACO.

### B. Step-By-Step Guide



1. **Informed Champions** – Perhaps even ahead of this first step may be that there needs to be some ACO information available to plant the seed of awareness with a few local champions. These champions, whether hospital CEO, family physician, or neurosurgeon, will need to invest their “sweat equity” to get up to speed (the main purpose of this ACO Guide). The champions need to reach beyond silos and see whether cultural compatibility is possible.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

**2. Strategy Formulation/Gap Analysis** – Next, a small core group should honestly assess where they are and where they need to go. What is the target market (i.e., chronic disease, Medicaid, the elderly)? Does an ACO make sense? What do we target? How do we make sure this is fair and successful so that we get buy-in? Some experts recommend a phased approach starting with primary care, then adding select specialists and hospitals around targeted high-impact initiatives, then a comprehensive panel, and then, finally, including public health and social services. Other experts recommend matching the natural strengths of the ACO with the greatest gaps in care for the local area. Then they would have the ACO model a strategic business case, to create a roadmap to development. How will it achieve all of the 8 Essential Elements? Keep the team very small at this stage.

**3. Clear Vision** – The organizing group needs to have credibility and will need to unite around a clear and compelling shared vision.

**4. Clinical Integration** – Through shared decision-making and champion leadership, build capabilities of a clinically integrated organization. Review the plan for presence of the 8 Essential Elements listed in Chapter V. The TACC is creating specialty-specific strategic toolkits to assist each specialty in building in capabilities and programs to optimize that specialty's contribution to, and thus reward from, an ACO. Please see Part Two, Section II, for the completed toolkits. If yours is not present, please contact Melanie Phelps at [mphelps@ncmedsoc.org](mailto:mphelps@ncmedsoc.org) to see how you and your specialty society can partner with the TACC to develop a state-of-the-art toolkit.

- a. Start with your initial targeted initiatives.
- b. From them, establish best practices for the continuum of care for all providers involved with that type of patient.
- c. “Blow up” the best practices into component parts and assign clinical leadership responsibility for each.
- d. Identify which clinical data sets and decision support tools are needed at each step.
- e. Assign performance metrics and financial accountability for same.
- f. Determine HIT technical requirements.
- g. Determine best financial tools to incentivize desired behavior by all involved (i.e., share savings with predetermined performance benchmarks and distribution methodology). The TACC has engaged the law firm of Smith Anderson Blount Dorsett Mitchell & Jernigan, LLP and the health care valuation firm of HORNE, LLP to develop a multi-based shared savings distribution model for use by ACOs with multiple specialties. It will be made available by the TACC.



# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

5. **Structural Foundation** – Choose the legal entity approach and formal governance structure most appropriate to your culture and business plan. It must be driven by the form most likely for the success of the ACO, not controlled by success for any particular stakeholder. Establish membership criteria and a shared decision-making structure. Design and undertake training. Develop payor strategy and contract terms. Do “ROI” predictive modeling to estimate savings and quality benefits. Create credible value talking points for all stakeholders. If you choose to participate in the Medicare Shared Savings Program, make sure you meet all the structural requirements, which are not onerous.
6. **Expand Buy-In** – Broaden structured involvement. Create a multi-disciplinary integration committee with HIT, best practices, patient engagement, and finance subcommittees.
7. **Accountability Function** – Develop data metrics, measurement capability, and sophisticated financial administration capabilities to manage financial shared savings distribution. Set performance targets. Normalize data. Make sure your performance-based incentives target your ACO objectives.
8. **Start Small** – Start with a demonstration or pilot project.
9. **Contract with Payors** – Once ready, contract to provide integrated accountable care services on a shared savings basis, at least initially, for your target patient population. The patient population scale must be adequate to achieve economies of scale. Consider a Medicare ACO starting in January of 2014 as part of a broader strategy. (See Part Two for a blueprint on applying to the Medicare ACO and Medicare ACO Advance Payment Model programs.
10. **Assess and Improve** – Assess results of the process. Make adaptations to create a constant quality improvement (“CQI”) loop. Collect and distribute the savings pool roughly in proportion to contributions to it.

## VII. Conclusion

The Accountable Care Organization holds great promise to address many of the ills of America’s health care system. However, it will require new skill-sets, collaboration partners, technology, and systems. It will require a radically different approach to shared accountability. It is the goal of this ACO Guide to demystify ACOs for all stakeholders and to provide some tools and confidence to allow health care leaders to take prudent risks for greater success than they otherwise would have.

**For more information on any aspect of this ACO Guide, please contact Julian (“Bo”) Bobbitt at either 919-821-6612 or [bbobbitt@smithlaw.com](mailto:bbobbitt@smithlaw.com). ([www.smithlaw.com](http://www.smithlaw.com))**



# Part Two: Accountable Care Guide for Hospice and Palliative Care



# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

## I. Introduction

### A. Purpose of this Guide

The companion The Physician's Accountable Care Toolkit© describes what it takes to create a successful ACO and the steps to get there. Since it is fundamental that an ACO be a win/win for all involved, it applies whether one is a primary care physician, specialist physician, or hospice executive. This Accountable Care Guide for Hospice & Palliative Care on the other hand, spells out specific strategies for hospice and palliative care providers, whether in a small rural hospital, a large independent practice or employed by a health system.



### B. Recap of The Physician's Accountable Care Toolkit©

1. **What Is an ACO?** – Former Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (“CMS”) Mark McClellan, M.D., Ph.D. described an ACO as follows: “ACOs consist of providers who are jointly held accountable for achieving measured quality improvements and reductions in the rate of spending growth. Our definition emphasizes that these cost and quality improvements must achieve overall per capita improvements in quality and cost, and that ACOs should have at least limited accountability for achieving these improvements while caring for a defined population of patients.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mark McClellan, Director of the Engleberg Center for Health Care Reform at the Brookings Institution, *A National Strategy to Put Accountable Care Into Practice*, Health Affairs (May 2010), p. 983.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

Similarly, the National Committee for Quality Assurance (“NCQA”) included the following definition in its draft ACO criteria: “Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) are provider-based organizations that take responsibility for meeting the health care needs of a defined population with the goal of simultaneously improving health, improving patient experiences, and reducing per capita costs, ... There is emerging consensus that ACOs must include a group of physicians with a strong primary care base and sufficient other specialties that support the care needs of a defined population of patients. A well-run ACO should align the clinical and financial incentives of its providers.... ACOs also will need the administrative infrastructure to manage budgets, collect data, report performance, make payments related to performance, and organize providers around shared goals.”<sup>2</sup>

2. **This is Big, Different and Inevitable** – If we stay on the current spending glide path, by 2035, health care costs in this country will be more than the total of all tax and other revenues collected in our country, and by 2080, taxpayer funded health care will equal all of our governmental revenues, meaning that everything else—defense, roads, education—must be funded by borrowing. The other options are simply unthinkable: tax increases, rationing care, or drastic reimbursement cuts. As a country, our health care costs are more than 50 percent more than in any other country, but we are now ranked 32nd in what we get for our investment. The Congressional Budget Office laid the groundwork for accountable care’s “pay-for-value” underpinning when it reported that much of the blame for our runaway health care costs should be placed on our fee-for-service payment system where “providers have a financial incentive to provide higher-intensity care in greater volume, which contributes to the fragmented delivery of care that currently exists.”

Besides fragmentation, duplication and “more is better” excess, there are significant unjustified variations in quality and costs of care for similar patient populations. Yet, when motivated providers collaborate to drive the highest quality outcomes and the lowest costs, they do. Wonderful things happen—the patient is happier, employers finally see a slackening of spiraling health care costs, physicians regain control of the physician-patient relationship, and there is “found money” in savings from squeezing out waste to reward them for their efforts.

Yes, reversing the way health care is paid for is big, and it will require significant change. But, physician-led accountable care is the best way to fix health care and provide physicians financial and professional reward.

---

<sup>2</sup> National Committee for Quality Assurance, Accountable Care Organization (ACO) Draft 2011 Criteria, p. 3.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

## C. What Are the Essential Elements of a Successful ACO?



There are eight essential elements of any successful ACO. All eight are required. You cannot skip a step. As early ACO success and failure reports confirm, by far, the most important element for ACO success is the creation of an interdependent culture of mutual accountability committed to higher quality at the lowest cost.

1. **Culture** – Full collaboration and true partnering among hospitals, physicians and other providers will drive success. This must be coupled with a buy-in to work in teams to drive value with a “win/win” population management philosophy. This is way, way out of physicians’ and hospital administrators’ comfort zones. Physicians love independence, autonomy and often just want to see patients. Administrators have heretofore succeeded through strong leadership direction and infrastructure control. **“The most significant challenge of becoming accountable is not forming an organization, it is in forging one.”**<sup>3</sup> Culture keys are: champions, governance and merit-incentives.

2. **Primary Care Physicians** – When reviewing Element 6 below, the core role of primary care becomes clear. Prevention, wellness, care transition and patient coordination management are the “low-hanging fruit” for ACO improvements and savings and are all in primary care’s sweet spot. Primary care is the only sub-specialty required in Medicare’s ACO program. Sophisticated ACOs will thrive with hospitals, specialists and community health partners, but primary care, at least one-third of the total membership, will always be at the core.

<sup>3</sup> Phillip L. Rowing, *Becoming Accountable*, HFMP Compendium Contemplating the ACO Opportunity, Appendix, p. 40 (Nov. 2010).

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

3. **Adequate Administrative Capabilities** – ACO structural, operational and legal considerations are essential, but are relatively straightforward. Developing the interdependent culture and commitment to clinical transformation across the full continuum of care are more elusive and should receive most of the ACO leadership's attention. Ironically, because they are objective, readily measurable, and more familiar, structural, operational, legal and HIT issues often consume the bulk of planning time, leaving the subjective and “invisible” culture and care transformation issues behind.

4. **Adequate Financial Incentives** – “[I]f incentives are correctly aligned, organic innovations to solve other problems can and will engage... Anticipated early versions of ACO payment incentives are likely to be directionally correct but unlikely to be sufficient to create the needed burning platform.”<sup>4</sup> One rule of thumb may be found in antitrust law, where the behavior changing tipping point in health care is considered to be roughly 20 percent of total compensation. Fifty percent savings for ACOs not taking downside financial risk is a fairly common measure and viewed by most as adequate.

5. **Health Information Technology and Data** – Every successful ACO will run on a sound technology platform with meaningful, actionable data at the point of care, transferable across the continuum, and available in aggregate form to prioritize ACO initiatives, measure performance, and report to payors and health care regulators. In contrast to fee-for-service with its demands of physician time and lack of incentives to log and study data, ACO physicians clamor for such information. These HIT and data capabilities need not be prohibitively expensive nor mandate linking EMRs. Sometimes a “Chevy” will get you where you need to go just about as well as a “Cadillac.”

6. **Best Practices Across the Continuum of Care** – The five identified high-impact target areas for ACO initiatives are:

- Prevention and wellness;
- Chronic disease (75 percent of all U.S. health care spending, much of it preventable);
- Reduced hospitalizations;
- Care transitions (across our fragmented system); and
- Multispecialty care coordination of complex patients.

“The best bet for achieving returns from integration is to prioritize initiatives specifically targeting waste and inefficiency caused by fragmentation in today’s delivery system, unnecessary spending relating to substandard clinical coordination, aggravated with the complexity of navigating episodes of care, and unwanted variations in clinical outcomes driven by lack of adherence to best clinical practice.”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Ann Robinow, *Accountable Care News*, *The Top 30 Obstacles to ACO Implementation*, (Dec. 2010).

<sup>5</sup> *Toward Accountable Care*, The Advisory Board Company (2010).

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

7. **Patient Engagement** – How can your compensation be based on outcomes when the patient is not “in the game?” Patient engagement and patient-centeredness are essentials to ACO success for this reason. The patient who has not self-referred to your office but should is more important to population health management than the one who has. Two simple strategies often seen in successful ACOs are longer face-to-face initial visits with patients/families employing true communication skills and nurse coordinators who follow up with patients after they leave the facility or office. Technology is extending the virtual reach of these physicians and coordinators and are proving their “ROI,” or return on investment, in the value-based payment era.

8. **Scale-Sufficient Patient Population** – There are certain front end investments and ongoing fixed costs requiring a minimum scale of patient population to succeed. Medicare’s ACO minimum threshold of 5,000 beneficiaries is a useful benchmark.

## **D. These Apply to Everyone**

Because a successful ACO must be “win/win,” with every stakeholder motivated to achieve their optimum value-added contribution to the enterprise, these principles transcend medical specialty, employment status, payer relationship, or facility type. They apply to you whether you are a primary care physician, hospital CEO, director of a palliative care program, community nonprofit or specialist physician. They are not mysterious; they are doable; culture dominates. It is the goal of The Physician’s Accountable Care Toolkit© to serve as a roadmap for every reader to be able to unlock ACO success for their patients, themselves and their ACO.

## **II. Could Accountable Care Be A Good Thing For Palliative Care and Hospice Providers?**

In *The Physician’s Accountable Care Toolkit©*, we learned what an ACO is, that it will not be going away, and how to know if one stands to be successful. But what, specifically, will this mean for the palliative care providers?

*Introductory Note:* Our discussion of palliative care in this guide includes hospice. We adopt the view that hospice is a subset of palliative care, reserved for patients believed to be in their last six (6) months of life. By contrast, palliative care encompasses all care that focuses on “ameliorating disease burden and seeks to maximize patient functioning and quality of life among patients with life-limiting illnesses.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Taylor, Donald H., et al., *The Effect of Palliative Care on Patient Functioning*, 16 JOURNAL OF PALLIATIVE MEDICINE 10, 1227 (2013).



# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

We recognize that there are various models and levels of integration for palliative care and hospice organizations. As a result, the recommendations that follow may not be applicable to all palliative care and/or hospice organizations. The recommendations are merely a starting point and reflect strategies that may be modified and adapted based on variables such as geographic location, provider team make-up, and breadth of service offerings. Henceforth, for ease of reading, we will use the term “palliative care provider,” but the intent is to apply all ACO strategies to hospice unless clearly indicated otherwise.

## A. Pros

- Many palliative care providers will find that the greatest positives of a well-organized ACO, such as improved communication and coordination of care among physicians on behalf of and with patients, are already components of palliative care models of care.
- Since teamwork and the ability to form partnerships across the care continuum are hallmarks of palliative care, palliative care providers can serve as leaders and share their care model with other providers, particularly other specialists.
- System-wide care delivery improvements will vastly leverage the care expertise of palliative care providers and may remove much of the frustration they experience with the current health care system.
- In addition, an ACO value-based payment model will resolve some of the existing reimbursement challenges for palliative care providers. For example, it has been shown that hospice use reduced Medicare expenditures by an average of \$2,300 per hospice service user (\$7,318 v \$9,627 for controls).<sup>7</sup> Savings amounts will increase further from the formation of collaborative cultures adhering to the eight essential elements for successful ACOs identified in *The Physician’s Accountable Care Toolkit*®. The established chronic care management company, CareMore (now, CareMore Wellpoint) has achieved significant financial incentive payments by focusing on the type of strategies outlined in this *Guide* in the Medicare Advantage Program. They focus on the very frail or those at risk or currently living with complex, chronic conditions, and have achieved a dramatic 18 percent reduction in member costs below the industry average.
- As with all physicians who have been heroically battling a deeply fragmented system to provide cost-effective care, palliative care providers will find rewarding a model designed to truly gauge and value their contributions to health care, show respect for what they have been attempting to do and validate why they chose health care as a profession.

---

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, Donald H., *et al.*, “What length of hospice use maximizes reduction in medical expenditures near death in the US Medicare Program.” 65 Soc. Sci. Med. 1466-1478 (2007).

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

- As ACOs become more sophisticated, they are beginning to focus on post-acute care as well. The December 2013 edition of *ACO Business News* reported that, “[a]s accountable care organizations get better control over quality and cost in acute settings, they’re beginning to pursue partnerships with skilled nursing facilities as an initial step in gaining leverage over care in the post-acute setting.”<sup>8</sup> The article also noted the importance of burgeoning partnerships with home health and hospice. This means that palliative care providers and organizations have a great opportunity to help shape the next generation of ACOs. **“Our greatest opportunity to enhance value in U.S. health care is to improve quality of care for older adults with [likely incurable] serious illness....”**<sup>9</sup> Once health care moves well into the value-based reimbursement transition, palliative care providers will view involvement in a successful ACO as important to providing professional satisfaction and economic rewards.
- A February 24, 2014 article in *The Wall Street Journal*<sup>10</sup> provided the following information that helps make the case for greater emphasis on hospice and palliative care:
  - o \$50 billion, about 10 percent of Medicare funds, is the annual spending on the last month of patients’ lives;
  - o Sixty-five percent (65%) is the share of health care spending that goes toward the sickest 10 percent of patients, an average of \$157,510 annually per patient;
  - o Sixty-five percent (65%) is the share of poor-prognosis cancer patients who are hospitalized during the last month of life;
  - o Twenty-five percent (25%) is the share of poor-prognosis cancer patients who use a hospital intensive care unit during the last month of life;
  - o Thirty percent (30%) is the percentage of poor-prognosis cancer patients who die in the hospital;
  - o \$5,000 to \$7,000 is the annual savings per patient when palliative care is provided alongside usual care, according to studies.
- The current *status quo* is not an option.
- Profitable payments to hospitals and physicians for high-cost, low-impact care associated with chronic diseases will soon be a thing of the past.
- While change is difficult, the risks of doing nothing are much higher.

<sup>8</sup> ACO Business News, *ACOs Eye SNFs as Partners in Post-Acute Quality, Care Coordination Initiatives*. Vol. 4, No. 12, 1 (December 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Henson, Laura, *et al.*, *Measuring Quality of Care for Older Adults with Serious Illness*, Health Affairs Blog (January 22, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas J. Smith, director of the Johns Hopkins Palliative Care Program.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

## B. Cons

- Palliative care providers are working hard and have run out of spare intellectual bandwidth to power these changes.
- You have seen this “next big thing” before, and it didn’t work out as advertised.
- The patient overlap that palliative care providers have with providers in other specialties means that gaining the buy-in of specialists can be particularly challenging for territorial reasons.
- It will be difficult for specialists to give up independence and be interdependent with other physicians and hospitals.
- In addition, most ACO models do not yet include palliative care. This is due to the fact that many ACOs initially focused on primary care and avoiding hospitalizations. However, the ultimate risk is that if palliative care providers and other physicians will not step up to have a seat at the table, ACOs will not be properly constructed, the model will fail, and only dismal alternatives will remain.
- Moreover, the health care delivery system is changing and the risk of being a mere observer is marginalization and lack of coordination.

## III. The Recommended Approach For Developing Specialist Accountable Care Strategies

In the value-based reimbursement era, each specialty is rethinking its role. Some of the questions confronting specialists are: **What is our maximum value-adding contribution across an entire patient population? How can we generate quality and savings improvements for the ACO and thus maximize performance rewards for our specialty?** This rethinking is perhaps most dramatic regarding savings. The gain will not be from seeing a patient cheaper or quicker, but how to reduce costs for a patient population over a given period of time, often one to three years. Quality metrics exist to measure the quality of care rendered by one physician to one patient. But it is as fundamental as it is radically different, that accountable care strategic developments for any specialty focus on excising avoidable waste across the continuum of care for the entire patient population. New coordination, transition, education and engagement metrics will need to be developed and properly weighted by peer clinicians.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

A hint of what a specialty should prioritize is given by this list of the top five high-yield targets for ACOs:

- Wellness/prevention
- **Chronic care management**
- **Reduced hospitalizations**
- **Care transitions**
- **Multi-specialty coordination of complex patients**

\* Emphasis in bold added to targets most suitable for palliative care focus

From these potential initiatives, prioritize the ones that are likely to have the quickest and biggest results, proven metrics, and community health care leaders willing to champion the effort. What is working elsewhere? This should reveal for the specialty its potential prioritized list of value-add ACO initiatives.

Once this list is in hand, the last step is to marry them in a particular locale through a gap analysis to the areas of avoidable waste in that region. The specialist can then make a compelling case that an area of the patient population's greatest need is matched with that specialty's greatest strengths.

The specialists also can benefit from ACO negotiation and marketing tips, knowledge of how to ensure fair savings pool distribution, and what clinically valid metrics should be used to accurately measure their performance.

Ideally, this process should be led by a well-respected and diverse peer "Accountable Care Workgroup" of a national or state professional society, of that category of providers.

## **IV. The Process Followed For Creation Of This Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care Providers**

Several palliative care physician leaders realized that palliative care providers should be prepared for the approaching accountable care era. They engaged their state association, The Carolinas Center for Hospice and End of Life Care, to work with the Toward Accountable Care (TAC) Consortium and Initiative. A Hospice and Palliative Care Accountable Care Workgroup was formed. Following initial guidance from members of the Hospice and Palliative Care Workgroup, staff and attorneys for the TAC Consortium and Initiative conducted a national literature search, with emphasis on value-based care and benchmarking recommendations.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

**Strategic Note:** Many, if not most, of the non-preventive care best practices from the fee-for-service environment may not be particularly useful without adaptation, as they tend to focus on specialist care and treatment interventions in a fee-for-service setting of an individual patient. In contrast, palliative care focuses on patient engagement and goals of medical decision making, pushing knowledge “upstream” to the primary care or referring physician, or transitioning across a “siloe,” fragmented system. Likewise, metrics abound evaluating individual care, but are not yet common in areas such as transition, care coordination, care team education or increased access through telemedicine.

Potential initiatives underwent further review by the Hospice and Palliative Care Accountable Care Workgroup, with the TAC Consortium and Initiative support team directed to perform more in-depth analysis of select possible target areas. These findings were further reviewed and revised by the Hospice and Palliative Care Accountable Care Workgroup and presented to The Carolinas Center for Hospice and End of Life Care and the TAC Consortium and Initiative Physician Advisory Committee. Macro predictive cost savings estimates were made, but a refined financial predictive modeling analysis, though needed, is beyond the scope of this project. Likewise, while guidance on the nature and type of performance metric selection is provided, the actual full mapping of those metrics is beyond the scope of this project.

The researchers and physician peer reviewers are comfortable that this represents a useful start in this important and rapidly evolving field. This *Guide* is a beginning, not an end, to the process.

## **V. Recommended ACO Initiatives For Palliative Care Providers**

### **A. Awareness/Leadership/Urgency: Palliative Care’s Role in Guiding Changes**

Palliative care providers need to know what an ACO is, how to recognize one with a likelihood of success, and the professional opportunities and risks involved (the purposes of this *Accountable Care Guide for Hospice and Palliative Care*). A number of leaders need to get up to speed and be catalysts for this transformative change. These champions need to act with confidence, but also with a sense of urgency. This is mentioned as a strategy in and of itself because the biggest risk of failure of the accountable care movement and either collapse of Medicare and Medicaid or default to Draconian alternatives is lack of informed provider leadership. If you do not become involved, there is a good chance that the roles of palliative care will be missed and, like some early ACOs, you will not be involved at all in the shared savings pool distribution. Every successful ACO starts with a few champions. Why not have one be a palliative care physician? As Bert Coffer, M.D., said: “If you don’t have a seat at the table, you are on the menu.”

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

## **B. Serve as a Model for Forming/Leveraging Experience and Ability to Form Partnerships Across Care Continuum**

Palliative care is well-prepared for integration into ACOs. As Janet Bull, M.D., a member of our Hospice and Palliative Care Workgroup, said, “One of the hallmarks of good palliative care is teamwork and the ability to form partnerships across the care continuum.” Hospice and palliative care operate on a model of interdisciplinary teamwork that could serve as an example for other care providers in their specialty areas. In addition, palliative care and hospice stress the importance of seamless transition handoffs between different health care clinicians and settings, while maintaining focus on the patient. Continuity of care and transitions across the post-acute continuum are essential in successful ACO models. Thus, Palliative care providers could help establish care continuity models and create partnerships with specialists that would ensure care coordination, one of the driving objectives behind ACOs.

“Palliative care can serve as a successful model for an ACO scale care coordination program for several reasons:

- The care team looks more like a community of caregivers;
- Patient care is coordinated regardless of access to technology;
- The patient is at the center;
- The family is an integral part of the care team;
- Care extends from an inpatient setting all the way into the home and back again.”<sup>11</sup>

Given this skill set, palliative care providers should consider the various settings of care in which they can be capable agents of partnership and change. Unlike most specialty disciplines, palliative care providers add value across all care settings, particularly in helping patients transition between various care settings. While many clinicians are aware of the presence of patient palliative care consultations and are familiar with hospice, many other important opportunities for palliative care exist throughout the care continuum. For example, in a community setting, specifically in primary care providers’ practices, hospice and palliative care providers can serve as educators for advanced care planning communication techniques and suggest triggers for identifying patients who would be most appropriate for goals of care discussions. In addition, palliative care providers can share their experience and expertise regarding advanced symptom management (i.e., pain and nausea), and prognostication. Skills similar to those that palliative care consultants offer in the acute care setting can be offered in the primary care or community-based setting. These services can be offered through outpatient clinical practices that are stand-alone, co-located or embedded, via telemedicine consults, or through provider education programs. Palliative care providers also can offer their skills via community-based

---

<sup>11</sup> Goldberg, Rebecca, *Palliative Care: A Model for a Successful ACO-Scale Coordination Program?*, Blu Bolt, BluePring Healthcare IT, [www.blueprinthis.com](http://www.blueprinthis.com) (2013).

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

practices that provide home-based services and facility visits (i.e., long-term care and assisted-living) through pre-hospice bridge programs, Advanced Illness Management Programs, or other home-based palliative care services.<sup>12</sup>

Leading providers in the palliative care field believe that “palliative care...[has] a window of opportunity to shape the post-acute care continuum by offering models that better integrate outpatient and inpatient services. Outpatient palliative care is one such model.”<sup>13</sup> Many of those same experts describe outpatient palliative care programs as a “new frontier of palliative care” as “[t]he outpatient palliative care clinic model can play a key role in ensuring continuity of care across settings; its function is particularly important at transitions when patients leave the hospital and return to their homes and communities...[o]utpatient palliative care is becoming a bridge to hospice.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, palliative care can serve as a successful model for ACO-scale care coordination beyond the acute care setting.<sup>15</sup>

## C. Leadership on Best Practices

Recent figures released by the Centers for Disease Control estimate that about half of all American adults have at least one chronic illness, such as diabetes, high blood pressure or coronary heart disease. Chronic illnesses account for more than 75 percent of U.S. health care costs and nine of 10 Medicare patients die of chronic diseases. Almost one-third of Medicare dollars are spent on beneficiaries during the last year of life and nearly 40 percent of that spending occurs in the last 30 days of life.<sup>16</sup>

Areas where palliative care excel are in chronic disease management and end-of-life care. Many of the patients who receive palliative and hospice care have complex illnesses that require careful management through reliance on an interdisciplinary care team. Palliative care programs that are positioned across the continuum of care settings have been valued, successful components of bending the cost curve.<sup>17</sup> Through patient-centered care customization, palliative care lowers overall health care costs. Goals of care discussions often lead patients to choose less invasive/aggressive care paths, thereby avoiding unnecessary procedures and hospitalizations, while aligning therapies more concordantly with their care goals. Effective symptom management, whether in a skilled nursing facility, an acute care setting, or the patient’s home, provides patients and families critical support and decreases excessive expenditures. In addition, the use of the palliative care decreases readmissions

<sup>12</sup> Innovations Exchange Team (AHRQ); Beresford, Larry and Kerr, Kathleen, *Next Generation of Palliative Care*

<sup>13</sup> Bull, Janet et al., *Demonstration of a Sustainable Community-Based Model of Care Across the Palliative Care Continuum*, 44 J. OF PAIN AND SYMPTOM MGMT. 6, 797, 808 (Dec. 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Bull, Janet et al., *Establishing a Regional, Multistate Database*

<sup>15</sup> The Center to Advance Palliative Care, IPAL-OP, available at: <http://www.capc.org/ipal/ipal-op>.

<sup>16</sup> Face the Facts Website, *During Final Difficult Days, Medicare Spending Spikes*, September 7, 2012, available at: <http://www.facethefactsusa.org/facts/during-final-difficult-days-medicare-spending-spikes>; Hogan, C. et al., *Medicare Beneficiaries’ Costs and Use of Care in the Last Year of Life: Final Report to the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission*, Washington, DC: Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Bendaly, E.A. et al., *Financial impact of palliative care consultation in a public hospital*, 11 J. OF PALLIATIVE MED. 10, 1304-08 (2008); R.S. Morrison et al., *Cost savings associated with US hospital palliative care consultation programs*, 168 ARCH. INTERN. MED. 16, 1783-90 (2008); T.J. Smith, et al., *A High-Volume Specialist Palliative Care Unit and Team May Reduce In-Hospital End-of-Life Care Costs*, 6 J. OF PALLIATIVE MED. 5, 699-705.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

and length of stay, while increasing quality of life and life span.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, the use of palliative care decreases the use of high-cost, low-value treatments resulting in more efficient use of health care resources.

Because palliative care has demonstrated experience with clinical best practices, providers in this area can lead the incorporation and development of similar initiatives for ACOs. Palliative care providers also can help other practitioners better identify where patients are within the chronic disease trajectory and steer them to the appropriate resources in a timely manner.

Don't know where to start? Try these:

1. **Use the “Surprise” Question** – Get the discussion going with other providers by asking, “Would you be surprised if this patient died in the next twelve months?” It can be helpful in engaging primary care teams in an integrated holistic approach to optimize disease management and create a natural relationship with palliative care and hospice providers.
2. **Identify High-Risk, High-Cost Patients** – Identify populations that are fragile, utilize services that are higher cost but low value, or have high reoccurrence of symptoms due to disease progression or psychosocial issues. Work with disease management teams to identify populations in need of palliative services. Risk stratification is an important aspect of population health management.

## **D. Patient and Family Engagement and Education**

One emphasis of ACOs is patient-centered care aimed at creating a partnership between patient and physician. Palliative care focuses on determining patient needs and desires to help formulate a care plan. This patient-centered focus means that, with guidance from their palliative care team of providers, care for each individual is matched to patient-determined goals.

Allowing patients to be part of the care plan development helps ensure their ongoing engagement and investment in their health care needs. In addition, patient adherence to a care plan and self-management help drive down health care costs.

Palliative care also emphasizes patient and family education as a means of achieving the patient-centered goals of care and preventing unnecessary or unwanted care. Palliative care affords an opportunity for patients and families to be introduced to advance care planning questions including designation of surrogate decisions makers (HCPOA) and completion of POLST/MOST (NC) type documents.<sup>19</sup> Providers can initiate and/or facilitate these sometimes challenging, time-consuming,

---

<sup>18</sup> Adler, Eric et al., *Palliative Care in the Treatment of Advanced Heart Failure*, 120 CIRCULATION 25, 2597, 2597 (2009); R. Sean Morrison et al., *Palliative Care Consultation Teams Cut Hospital Costs For Medicaid Beneficiaries*, 30 HEALTH AFFAIRS 3, 454-63 (Apr. 7, 2011); Jennifer S. Temel et al., *Early Palliative Care for Patients with Metastatic Non-Small-Cell Lung Cancer*, 363 N. ENG J. MED. 8, 733, 738 (August 19, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> www.polst.org



# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

yet vital, discussions around goals of care. A study involving in-home palliative care, which focused on pain and symptom management and patient and family education training, demonstrated significantly increased patient care satisfaction while reducing medical resources utilization and costs at the end of life.<sup>20</sup> Palliative care providers can help ACOs develop patient-centered care models and educational tools for primary care and specialist providers to use with their patients.

Patient and family engagement allows for a partnership between patients and health care providers to ensure that decisions respect patients' goals and preferences, and provides education and support so that informed decision-making can occur. This engagement can occur on multiple levels: direct patient care, organizational and governance structure and policy-making.

## **E. Provider Engagement and Education**

ACOs rely on active involvement of and communication between all providers who are involved in a patient's care plan. This means that many different stakeholders are responsible for shaping the care for each patient in an ACO. Palliative care providers are accustomed to this collaborative model. In fact, palliative care is built on the ability to analyze a situation from multiple stakeholder perspectives and then respond appropriately. This model helps overcome territorial barriers specialist providers may feel concerning their patients. In addition, through education, primary care and specialist providers can learn about the wealth of palliative care resources available to their patients concurrently with curative treatment. In fact, with the appropriate training, many primary care and specialist providers can administer primary palliative care and learn to recognize more complex cases that require referral to palliative care providers. Palliative care providers can educate other providers within the ACO on primary palliative care and appropriate referral triggers. In addition, palliative care providers can educate other providers around communication skills that are effective for facilitating advance care planning and goals of care discussions. This also might include engaging providers around timely and appropriate completion of POLST/MOST (NC) types of documents for patients with significant disease burden. With a better understanding of palliative care and the ability to recognize and attend to basic palliative care needs, all providers are better equipped to address patient needs within an ACO and create a collaborative, effective care plan for each patient. Although many providers do not fully understand what palliative care is and how it might benefit their patients, once they are educated about the purpose and value of palliative care, they are more likely to initiate palliative care referrals and discuss palliative care and the associated resources with patients.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Brumley, Richard, et al., Increased Satisfaction with Care and Lower Costs: Results of a Randomized Trial of In-Home Palliative Care, 55 J. OF AM. GERIATRIC SOC. 7, 993-1000 (July 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Albert, Nancy M., *Referral for Palliative Care in Advanced Heart Failure*, 16 Progress in Palliative Care 5-6, 220, 224 (2008).

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

## F. Avoidance of Expensive Drugs and Procedures with Marginal Value

Opportunities for improved care and cost also exist in pharmacy and procedure selection. Polypharmacy and use of unnecessary procedures often adds to patient suffering. Palliative care focuses on improving quality of life through reduced symptom burden and supportive care. This value-based thinking will benefit the patients clinically and financially and benefit the shared savings. *Choosing Wisely*<sup>®</sup>, an initiative of the American Board of Internal Medicine (“ABIM”) Foundation, is a resource “to help physicians and patients engage in conversations to reduce overuse of tests and procedures and support physician efforts to help patients make smart and effective care choices.” (See, <http://www.abimfoundation.org/initiatives/choosing-wisely.aspx>.) The recommendations of the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine to the *Choosing Wisely*<sup>®</sup> initiative can be accessed at: <http://www.choosingwisely.org/doctor-patient-lists/american-academy-of-hospice-palliative-medicine/>. Some recommendations include:

- Don't recommend percutaneous feeding tubes in patients with advanced dementia; instead offer oral assisted feeding;
- Don't delay palliative care for a patient with serious illness who has physical, psychological, social or spiritual distress because they are pursuing disease-directed treatment; and
- Don't leave an implantable cardioverter-defibrillator (ICD) activated when it is inconsistent with the patient/family goals of care.

## G. Use of Technology

Use of modern communication technology is overdue in health care, but has been inhibited by the fee-for-service payment system. Intra-ACO communications should use all available and appropriate technology. The team-oriented approach to integrated care suggests obvious value-add benefits of utilizing video conferencing, telemedicine consults, email, etc. to bridge the gaps in our fragmented system. This will be particularly true in network ACOs and rural areas with limited access of patients and primary care providers to palliative care and hospice services. In addition, smaller outpatient palliative care and hospice programs will need to leverage ACO resources, which they can do more effectively and efficiently through technology. In other words, the use of technology is a means to an end, not the end itself, to successfully implement many of the other recommended initiatives. Under fee-for-service, using technology such as telemedicine was not compensated and thus disincentivized. In a value-based model, there is a clear return on investment.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

Accurate and reliable data is another critical way technology can be leveraged in the ACO setting. In order to make care improvements and establish appropriate metrics, ACOs must carefully track and analyze patient population data. Palliative care has developed effective tools for collecting data based on its need to demonstrate cost savings and effectiveness and, thus, justify its value.<sup>22</sup> As a result, palliative care providers can help ACOs develop reliable tools for collecting valuable data that will help ensure both the quality and value of care for all patients.

## H. Additional Research Support of Strategies

For additional research supporting many of the ideas and strategies discussed above, please visit the Center to Advance Palliative Care's website at the following address: <http://www.capc.org/research-and-references-for-palliative-care/citations/>. The site contains a compilation of research studies demonstrating the impact of palliative care in the areas of: (1) clinical care/quality of life; (2) cost; (3) patient or provider satisfaction; and (4) readmissions.

For a survey of research documenting cost-savings in palliative care, see "Evidence on the cost and effectiveness of palliative care: A literature review".<sup>23</sup>

## VI. We've Got Some Great ACO Contributions - Now What?

As noted, there are some clear strategies for improving care and reducing overall costs for commonly occurring disorders, which are ideal for accountable care's emphasis on collaboration and value-based reimbursement. But how does a palliative care provider find the right ACO partner, mesh these initiatives into programming, and be rewarded fairly?

### A. Pick the Right ACO(s)

As detailed in the companion white paper, *The Physician's Accountable Care Toolkit*®, there are eight elements essential for every successful ACO. They are agnostic as to who or what owns or hosts the ACO, but they must all be present.

Culture will usually be the tell-tale indicator on whether any ACO has a chance for success.

- **Physician-Led** – Longstanding habits of individualism and competition among physician groups will have to transform to a culture of cooperation and collaboration. Physicians have not led complex change, are resistant to capital risk, and worry that fewer tests and procedures will lower incomes.

<sup>22</sup> Kamal, Arif, *et al.*, "Collecting Data on Quality is feasible in Community-Based Palliative Care", 42 *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 5, 663 (2011); Kamal, Asif, *et al.*, "The Value of Data Collection within a Palliative Care Program" 13 (2011). *Carr.Oncol. Rep.* pp 308-315 (2011).

<sup>23</sup> Smith, Samantha, *et al.*, "Evidence on the cost and cost effectiveness of palliative care: A literature review" 28(2) *Palliative Medicine* 130-150 (2013).

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

- **Hospital-Led** – Hospitals need to change focus from the current business model of providing acute inpatient care and address head-on the operational impact of decreased admissions. Hospitals need to adopt a partnering culture with physicians and depart from a command-and-control approach encouraged by the fee-for-service system.

**Remember, even if a hospice and palliative care provider performs perfectly, he/she will still fail if the rest of the ACO is flawed.**

The eight elements will determine the attractiveness of the ACO regardless of whether it is part of a hospital system, under the roof of a large multi-specialty clinic, or a network of small practices. However, each model has its nuances and presents different strengths and weaknesses. Available ACO options will, of course, be different in metropolitan and rural settings. The presence or absence of palliative care practices affects ACO partnering options.

## **B. You Have Identified a Winning ACO, Now Have the ACO Want to Pick You**

1. **Build Relationships** – Palliative care providers should be engaged with all the medical specialties and the local health system. This is a first step to team-building and readiness to partner.
2. **Have a Compelling Story** – As noted, the skill sets of palliative care providers and some of the most obvious collaborative methods to improve patient care for certain chronic illnesses and for undifferentiated acute illnesses are ideally suited for ACOs. Utilizing them in an ACO is a “no-brainer.” We have heard of the “elevator pitch” for startups, whereby the entrepreneur can tell a convincing reason to invest in their company in the length of the time it takes to ride an elevator. Palliative care providers have a great story and should reduce it to one or two pages. These initiatives are simple “plug and play” add-ons to the ACO’s existing activities, are synergistic, and will help the ACO meet quality and savings goals.

**Strategic Note:** Start simple. Start with your one best initiative, and then expand later.

3. **Primary Care Is the Client** – In the new era, success will depend on the patient-centered medical home and neighborhood. Though primary care in some cases has lost its decision-making authority to health systems, payers and large clinics, at the end of the day, primary care will be your client.

## VII. What Are The Relevant Metrics?

### A. The Basic Categories and Sources

You will need baseline data, of course, to create the comparison point on quality, efficiency and patient satisfaction “before” the ACO took over so you can compare it to what happened “after.” Some of this data probably will be useful to determine local gaps in care to help you pinpoint initiatives to pursue. Broadly, the measures chosen will need to cover quality, efficiency and patient satisfaction. An ACO may choose to match clinical initiatives and metrics (e.g., prevention of readmissions for heart failure and the readmission rate for heart failure) but early metrics could be more general. The National Quality Forum, National Committee for Quality Assurance, and the metrics required for the CMS Medicare Shared Savings Program are recommended sources for nationally validated metrics. The AMA-convened Physician Consortium for Performance Improvement® and your own specialty society are other important sources of validated evidence-based measures. Thinking of ACO common interests will be helpful in decisions about metrics for your specialty. For example, in addition to metrics specific to palliative care providers, think about those that also are important to the ACO (e.g., the MSSP quality measures, utilization or cost-saving indicators) your hospital partner (Joint Commission measures) and payers.

### B. Examples of Measures That Serve Multiple Interests In the ACO

- Preventive services measures such as influenza and pneumonia vaccination, tobacco cessation counseling.
- Ambulatory sensitive admissions for CHF and for COPD.
- Acute care indicators such as aspirin for acute MI.
- Patient safety and care transition activities such as medication reconciliation, patient receipt of transition records, and fall risk assessment.
- Utilization and financial measures such as percentage revisits to Emergency Department, pmpm for Emergency Department care, imaging rates (CT, MRI).
- Emergency Department utilization rates.
- Emergency Department-to-hospital admission rates.

### C. Examples of Metrics to Measure Palliative Care Performance:

- Avoidance of admissions for CHF and COPD.
- Critical care usage and costs.
- Post acute episodes of care cost reductions.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

- Laboratory costs.
- Imaging costs.
- Pharmaceutical costs.
- Chemotherapy in the last month of life.
- Use of percutaneous feeding tubes in advanced dementia.
- Use of POLST/MOST (NC) in the last year of life.
- Following use-of-hospice guidelines for the last six months of life.
- Percentage constipated on pain meds.
- Survey – meeting the needs of patients and families results.
- Length of stay over 14 days.
- Hospital readmission reduction.
- Electronic information exchange.

## VIII. How Do I Ensure That The Savings Pool Distribution Is Fair?

As mentioned in the *Toolkit*, some of the savings pool distributions should be used to maintain the ACO infrastructure, to “prime the pump” as it were. As much as possible should go to incentivize providers and facilities for the extra management time, practice pattern changes and effort to create those savings. To create maximum motivation and trust, the proportion of distributions should be in proportion to the relative contributions to the pool. The more incentive, the greater the odds of increasing the size of the savings pool going forward.

**Strategic Note:** Some ACOs may choose to use a portion of their shared savings to partially compensate hospitals and specialists who are seeing revenue reductions due to changes in practice patterns (which is not offset by increase in market share and overhead reductions). Some ACOs will distribute savings to capital investors. We caution that such tactics will slow the transformational changes needed, sap motivation, and ultimately challenge the competitive viability of the ACO altogether.

The TAC Consortium and Initiative has published a guide to fair savings pool distribution, entitled *Distribution Based On Contribution - A Merit-based Shared Savings Distribution Model*, downloadable at the TAC Consortium and Initiative website: [www.tac-consortium.org](http://www.tac-consortium.org), or more specifically at: [http://www.tac-consortium.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Shared-Savings-Guide\\_091013\\_revised\\_reduced-file.pdf](http://www.tac-consortium.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Shared-Savings-Guide_091013_revised_reduced-file.pdf).

## IX. Protect Your Interests: Negotiating Tips

### A. Negotiating with ACOs

Physicians may be asked to sign ACO participation agreements with an ACO. While every provider who follows this guide will bring much to the table and is in position to negotiate a reasonable contract, these are specialized arrangements and it is recommended that you retain legal counsel knowledgeable in negotiating these types of agreements. Physicians should be particularly mindful of the following areas:

- **Investment** – Any ACO upfront cost obligations?
- **Ongoing Risk** – What happens if the ACO takes on medical cost risk and does not meet targets? Are you proportionately responsible?
- **Distribution of Savings** – It should be distributed in proportion to contribution to savings, after expenses, but will savings go to investors, owners, to cover lost hospital or providers' revenues relative to fee-for-service?
- **Data** – Who collects it? Is the severity adjusted? Are the metrics clinically valid for your specialty?
- **Corrective Action** – Your continued participation is tied to performance. ACO contracts will have “teeth.” Review the fairness and peer review aspects of the contract.
- **Exclusivity** – Are you contractually bound to just one ACO? (Distinguish from extra-contractual restrictions of a payer, including CMS.)
- **Support** – ACOs are team-based systems that should provide you every reasonable tool and human support to help you optimize your performance and patient care. These should be spelled out. The Physician's Accountable Care Toolkit© is specific about what types of support you should seek from your ACO.

### B. Negotiating with Private Payers

The bulk of this guide promotes your reimbursement optimization by: (1) designing high value initiatives; (2) earning participation in a well-designed ACO by making the value case; and (3) protecting your interests by negotiating a merit-based shared savings distribution.

However, in order to maximize revenues, both the ACO in its negotiations with commercial payers and you directly during this transition period, need to know what commercial payers are looking for regarding palliative and end-of-life care.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

- **Value-based Payment.** Commercial payers are moving to shared savings and risk contracts, usually with clinically integrated multi-disciplinary organizations. As we have seen, a “siloeed” palliative-care only arrangement cannot leverage the main savings opportunities you have. So, the value proposition outlined in this guide also holds true for the strategy to maximize reimbursement from commercial payers in these types of arrangements.
- **Hybrid/Transition Models.** Aetna initiated its Compassionate Care Program of concurrent use of palliative and curative care in a large pilot between 2004-2007. The data showed that hospice use increased, inpatient days were lower and net costs decreased by 22 percent. Since that time, other payers have been expanding access to palliative care through its inclusion in specialized case management and liberalized benefits.

Other innovations are occurring, but are all based on one theme: value, the highest quality at the lowest cost (higher patient/family satisfaction is a given).

- **Fee-for-Service.** Of course, use of savings data, and seeking expanded coverage, also are useful in fee for service negotiations. But fee-for-service tends to divorce costs from benefits and most benefits are patterned on the Medicare Hospice Benefit (which is limited to patients with an expected prognosis of six months or less and prohibits requests for curative care once patients choose palliative care). These make fee-for-service negotiations the most difficult for you to realize fair compensation.

## X. Conclusion

America's health care system will soon become unaffordable absent major change. The accountable care movement holds promise to address runaway costs and thus must be taken quite seriously. There are opportunities for professional and financial reward for the informed palliative care and hospice providers. Put another way, the risks of passivity are just too great. All the alternatives are unacceptable to a physician-led system of providing the highest quality at the lowest cost. Palliative care providers have skills and experience that position them to contribute significantly in the success of ACOs, but this is not yet widely recognized within the medical community. To make sure a fair and sustainable ACO model becomes reality, it is important for palliative care providers to step up with like-minded physicians to lead in this potentially career-changing transformation.

This *Guide* is intended to illustrate the significant opportunities for palliative care providers in accountable care, to assist Palliative care providers in avoiding the pitfalls, and for the development of accountable care strategies for Palliative care providers in different settings. For further information, contact the TAC Consortium and Initiative lead liaison, Melanie Phelps, at either [mphelps@ncmedsoc.org](mailto:mphelps@ncmedsoc.org) or 919-833-3836.



# Part Three: Executing the Accountable Care Strategic Plan



North Carolina  **Medical Society**  
*Leadership in Medicine*

 **THE  
PHYSICIANS  
FOUNDATION**  
Empowering Physicians  
Improving Healthcare

 **SMITH  
ANDERSON**

**Toward TAC Accountable Care  
Consortium**

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

## I. General Strategies for All Specialties

### A. Strategy Number 1: How to Successfully Navigate the Medicare MSSP and Advance Payment Model Application Process

America's largest payer, Medicare, has committed to the ACO model, with a minimum of 50 percent sharing of savings to ACO providers on top of fee-for-service payments. It may be totally or partially physician-driven, and only primary care physicians are required. To promote physician-only ACOs in non-metropolitan areas, CMS will prefund them through the Advance Payment Model. This level of sustainable funding through ongoing shared savings distributions can "pay for" your ACO operations that can in turn be used for Medicaid, private payer, or other patient population engagements. **The applications are consistent with the principles and strategies of this Physicians' ACO Toolkit, and it is a useful reference to assist in responding to substantive portions of the applications.**

To review, CMS established the Medicare Shared Savings Program (the "MSSP") to facilitate coordination and cooperation among health care providers through ACOs to improve the quality of care for Medicare beneficiaries, while reducing unnecessary costs. In addition, the PPACA established a new Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovations (the "Innovation Center") to test innovative care and service delivery models, including the "Advance Payment Model." This Chapter will assist ACOs in navigating the MSSP and Advance Payment Model application process.

#### 1. MSSP Application

Applying to the MSSP requires ACOs to submit a significant amount of information. As a result, organization, information gathering, and timing will all be critical for ACOs wishing to participate. The application process can be broken down into the following seven tasks: (a) identify timelines and deadlines; (b) creation and formation of the ACO; (c) file Notice of Intent to Apply; (d) obtain CMS User ID; (e) prepare and execute participation agreements; (f) prepare application; and (g) file application with CMS.

a. **Timelines and Deadlines** – Due to the sheer volume of information that must be submitted with the MSSP application, ACOs should begin the application process at least three months in advance. At the outset, ACOs interested in applying should review CMS's MSSP website, [www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-Service-Payment/sharedsavingsprogram/index.html](http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-Service-Payment/sharedsavingsprogram/index.html), and identify all relevant deadlines. The ACO should then create a task checklist to ensure that all documents, forms, and applications are timely filed. The list of tasks set forth below may serve as a useful template in creating such a checklist.

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

b. **Creation and Formation of the ACO** – ACOs applying to the MSSP must ensure that they are properly organized or incorporated under applicable state laws. Newly formed ACOs will need to file Articles of Organization or Articles of Incorporation with the applicable Secretary of State. Newly formed ACOs also will need an Employer Identification Number from the IRS, which may be obtained online at <https://sa.www4.irs.gov/modiein/individual/index.jsp>.

The ACO must also have an identifiable governing body, such as a board of directors, with responsibility for oversight and strategic direction of the ACO. The ACO must ensure that its participants have at least 75 percent control of the governing body, and at least one member of the governing body must be a Medicare beneficiary. In addition, the governing body must have a conflict of interest policy that: (a) requires each member of the governing body to disclose relevant financial interests; (b) provides a procedure to determine whether a conflict of interest exists, and sets forth a process to address any conflicts that arise; and (c) addresses remedial action for members of the governing body that fail to comply with the policy.

Finally, the ACO must appoint officers with leadership and oversight responsibility for the ACO. At a minimum, such officers must include an executive officer, a medical director, and a compliance officer. The executive officer (such as a president, CEO, or executive director) must have leadership responsibility for the ACO, including the ability to influence or direct the ACO's clinical practices to improve efficiency, processes and outcomes. The medical director must oversee the clinical management of the ACO. The compliance officer must be responsible for addressing compliance issues related to the ACO's operations and performance. The ACO will need to appoint all such officers prior to applying for the MSSP.

c. **Notice of Intent to Apply** – Before applying to the MSSP and Advance Payment Model, ACOs must file a Notice of Intent to Apply (“NOI”) with CMS. ACOs should be aware that the filing deadline for the NOI will be approximately three months prior to the filing deadline for the MSSP application. While all ACOs that wish to apply to the MSSP must file the NOI, filing the NOI does not obligate the ACO to complete the application process. Thus, **ACOs that are even remotely interested in the MSSP should submit a Notice of Intent to Apply to preserve the opportunity to later submit the MSSP application.**

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

d. **CMS User ID** – CMS currently requires all interested ACOs to file the MSSP application online using CMS’s secure web portal, the Health Plan Management System (“HPMS”); CMS will not accept paper applications. In order to use HPMS, the ACO must obtain a user ID and password using the CMS Form 20037 Application for Access to CMS Computer Systems, available at: [www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/CMS-Information-Technology/InformationSecurity/Downloads/EUAaccessform.pdf](http://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/CMS-Information-Technology/InformationSecurity/Downloads/EUAaccessform.pdf). After the ACO files the NOI, the ACO will receive an email from CMS with instructions for completing the Form 20037, along with the deadline for filing the Form 20037. The individual who will be preparing the MSSP application for the ACO should file the Form 20037.

e. **Participation Agreement** – ACOs applying to the MSSP must have participation agreements with their participating providers. At a minimum, the participation agreement must include: (a) an explicit requirement that the ACO participant will comply with the requirements and conditions of the MSSP; (b) a description of the ACO participants’ rights and obligations in and representation by the ACO; (c) a description of how the opportunity for shared savings or other financial arrangements will encourage ACO participants to adhere to the ACO’s quality assurance and improvement program and evidence-based clinical guidelines; and (d) remedial measures that will apply to ACO participants in the event of non-compliance with the requirements of their agreements with the ACO. The ACO will need to submit its signed participation agreements with each of its participants when it applies to the MSSP. As a result, ACOs will need to prepare their participation agreements well in advance of the application filing deadline and ensure adequate time to collect signed copies from participants.

f. **Preparing the Application** – As noted above, CMS now requires ACOs to file the MSSP application online using HPMS. Before completing the application online, however, ACOs should prepare all application materials in advance to ensure a smooth online application process. The ACO should first download and review the MSSP application template from the MSSP website. The ACO should use this document to assist in collecting and organizing contact information and other background information from ACO participants.

The ACO also will need to prepare a list of its participants, including the taxpayer identification number for each ACO participant. In order to avoid delays in the application process, the ACO will need to confirm that each participant’s name and taxpayer identification number listed in the MSSP application match exactly what is listed in the Medicare Provider Enrollment, Chain, and Ownership System (PECOS) for such participants. In addition, the ACO will need to prepare an organizational chart that includes the names of the ACO participants, governing board members, committees and committee members and officers.

A significant portion of the MSSP application consists of certain narrative responses that must be completed by the ACO. These narratives include descriptions of: (a) the ACO’s history, mission, and organization; (b) how the ACO plans to use shared savings payments; (c) how the ACO will use and protect Medicare data; (d) how the ACO will require its participants to comply with and implement

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

its quality assurance and improvement program; (e) how the ACO defines, establishes, implements, evaluates, and periodically updates its process to promote evidence-based medicine; (f) how the ACO defines, establishes, implements, evaluates and periodically updates its process to promote patient engagement; (g) how the ACO defines, establishes, implements, evaluates and periodically updates its process and infrastructure to support internal reporting on quality and cost metrics; and (h) how the ACO defines, establishes, implements, evaluates and periodically updates its care coordination processes. The ACO will need to carefully review the required elements of each narrative listed in the MSSP application and ensure that each element is discussed in detail; failure to address each required element may result in delay (or rejection) of the ACO's application. As mentioned, this Physicians' ACO Toolkit may be a useful aid in preparing this part of the application.

Assuming that the ACO has gathered all required information in advance, the process of filing the MSSP application through HPMS should be fairly straightforward. The ACO will first need to submit contact information for the ACO and complete certain attestations to ensure that the ACO meets all applicable requirements of the MSSP. The ACO will then submit supporting documentation (including the organizational chart, executed agreements, narratives and other documentation described above). Prior to uploading this documentation, the ACO will need to review the MSSP application reference table for instructions regarding file names and other HPMS uploading requirements, which is available at: [www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-ServicePayment/sharedsavingsprogram/Downloads/MSSP-Reference-Table.pdf](http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-ServicePayment/sharedsavingsprogram/Downloads/MSSP-Reference-Table.pdf).

Finally, the ACO will need to complete the CMS Form 588 Electronic Funds Transfer Authorization Agreement. This agreement, along with a voided check, must be sent to CMS using tracked mail, such as certified mail, Federal Express, or United Parcel Service. The CMS Form 588 is available at: [www.cms.gov/Medicare/CMS-Forms/CMS-Forms/downloads/cms588.pdf](http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/CMS-Forms/CMS-Forms/downloads/cms588.pdf).

## **2. Conclusion**

With this Medicare ACO roadmap, you should not feel concerned about successfully applying for both these programs. The substance sought by the actual questions is remarkably close to the principles and strategies of this Physician's ACO Toolkit. Together, if you have done the spadework to bring together the 8 Essential Elements, success should be straightforward.

**B. Strategy Number 2: [UNDER CONSTRUCTION.]**

**C. Strategy Number 3: [UNDER CONSTRUCTION.]**

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

## II. Specific Strategies for Specific Specialties

Accountable Care Guides for the following specialties can be accessed on the website for the Toward Accountable Care (TAC) Consortium and Initiative at [www.tac-consortium.org](http://www.tac-consortium.org).

**A. Anesthesiologists.** Previously, a separate copyrighted white paper and specialty-specific ACO strategic plan for anesthesiologists was developed by Smith Anderson and the North Carolina Society of Anesthesiologists (“NCSA”) ACO Task Force. It was underwritten by the NCSA, which holds distribution rights. If you are interested in obtaining a copy of these materials with permission, please contact the NCSA’s Executive Director, Karen Weishaar, at [kweishaar@smithlaw.com](mailto:kweishaar@smithlaw.com).  
[http://www.tac-consortium.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Anesthesiologist\\_ACO\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://www.tac-consortium.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Anesthesiologist_ACO_Toolkit.pdf)

**B. Emergency Physicians.** [Accountable Care Guide for Emergency Physicians is currently being developed by TACC personnel and the Accountable Care Workgroup of the North Carolina College of Emergency Physicians. (Fall 2013)]  
<http://www.tac-consortium.org/>

**C. Family Physicians.** Previously, a separate copyrighted white paper and specialty-specific ACO strategic plan was developed for family physicians. It was underwritten by the North Carolina Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and several state chapters. A copy of the paper and strategic plan may be accessed at [www.ncafp.com](http://www.ncafp.com) or by contacting Brent Hazelett, Deputy Executive Vice President, at [bhazelett@ncafp.com](mailto:bhazelett@ncafp.com).  
[http://www.ncafp.com/files/ACOGuide-CME\\_1.pdf](http://www.ncafp.com/files/ACOGuide-CME_1.pdf)

**D. Neurologists.** [Accountable Care Guide for Neurologists is currently being developed by TACC personnel and the Accountable Care Workgroup of the North Carolina Neurological Society.  
[http://www.ncmedsoc.org/non\\_members/legislative/ac/ACO%20Guide\\_Neurologist\\_103113.pdf](http://www.ncmedsoc.org/non_members/legislative/ac/ACO%20Guide_Neurologist_103113.pdf)

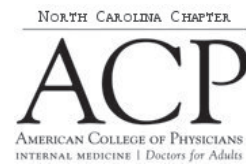
**E. Psychiatrists.** [Accountable Care Guide for Psychiatrists is currently being developed by TACC personnel and the Accountable Care Workgroup of the North Carolina Psychiatric Association.  
[http://www.ncmedsoc.org/non\\_members/legislative/ac/ACO-Guide-Psychiatry.pdf](http://www.ncmedsoc.org/non_members/legislative/ac/ACO-Guide-Psychiatry.pdf)

**F. Radiologists.** [Accountable Care Guide for Radiologists is currently being developed by TACC personnel and the Accountable Care Workgroup of the North Carolina Radiologic Society.  
[http://www.ncmedsoc.org/non\\_members/legislative/ac/ACO-Radiology-Toolkit.pdf](http://www.ncmedsoc.org/non_members/legislative/ac/ACO-Radiology-Toolkit.pdf)

**G. Urologists.** [Accountable Care Guide for Urologists is currently being developed by TACC personnel and the Accountable Care Workgroup of the North Carolina Urological Association. [http://www.ncmedsoc.org/non\\_members/legislative/ac/ACO\\_Guide\\_Urologist\\_102513.pdf](http://www.ncmedsoc.org/non_members/legislative/ac/ACO_Guide_Urologist_102513.pdf)

# Accountable Care Guide For Hospice and Palliative Care

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT



continued next page



Carolinas Chapter

