

A focus on advanced practice providers

A Vizient improvement community

Clinical Team Insights

Ensuring that patients receive effective and efficient care delivery is essential to meeting today's value-based health care demands. APPs — including physician assistants and advanced practice registered nurses — are an integral part of the clinical team, and their roles will continue to grow and expand. Health care organizations benefit from creating an infrastructure that supports the clinical care team and ensures their clinicians are working at the top of their scope of practice. Clinical Team Insights uses a data-driven approach to identify opportunities for improvement within your organizational structure and operations.

Vizient Member Networks

Vizient Member Networks comprise tightly connected, highly interactive and trusted communities of leaders who come together to share common experiences and challenges, learn from each other and industry leaders, resolve pressing issues by developing solutions together, and innovate to advance the vitality of their organizations and communities. Participants in our networks have access to cutting-edge research, relevant data, actionable insights and proven expertise to help address critical priorities, including clinician engagement and well-being.

Advanced practice providers (APPs) will comprise nearly two-thirds of professionals joining the health care workforce through 2030, outpacing the hiring of physicians.¹ With hospitals and health systems focused on recruiting more APPs and expanding their roles in care delivery models, it is critical to engage this key segment of the workforce to improve retention, promote top of license, and provide high-quality, cost-effective care.

In 2019, the Vizient® Central Network — a regional network of the Vizient Member Networks — identified that one of the greatest areas of opportunity for its region involved optimizing APPs. It decided to use the Vizient Clinical Team Insights (formerly Center for Advancing Provider Practices [CAP2™]) assessments to form the Central APP Improvement Community, helping members work together to quickly make improvements.

Central APP Improvement Community: optimizing the use of advanced practice providers

In early 2019, five health care organizations in Indiana and Ohio joined the Central APP Improvement Community, with three more joining during the year. These five organizations began their journey by completing all five Clinical Team Insights clinical workforce assessments in February 2019. These assessments enable leaders to develop and continually improve their organizational infrastructure and decrease variation throughout the organization, all while designing and deploying efficient care teams. In addition, they help organizations create infrastructures that support the entire clinical team and ensure team members are working at the top of their scope of practice.

When the Central APP Improvement Community first launched, members had already completed their assessments and were ready to review their scorecards; each high-level scorecard consists of nine domains that provide a guided analytic approach and help pinpoint opportunities for improvement. After initially identifying three domains — onboarding, APP leadership structure, and credentialing and privileging — the community decided to focus on APP leadership structure. Since APPs are a rapidly growing segment of the clinician workforce, the Central Network recognized it needed to begin work on a structure that would promote their professional development.

¹ Auerbach DI, Staiger DO, Buerhaus PI. Growing ranks of advanced practice clinicians — implications for the physician workforce. *NEJM Catal.* 2018;378:2358-2360. doi:10.1056/NEJMp1801869

Each of the organizations agreed to form multidisciplinary project workgroup teams composed of APPs, physicians, administrators and nursing leadership. Teams were given monthly assignments, with at least one member from each team attending monthly virtual meetings to provide progress updates. This gave attendees the opportunity to ask questions and learn from their peers. A total of nine monthly meetings and one in-person meeting were held throughout 2019. At the end of the year, the Clinical Team Insights clinical workforce assessments were retaken to identify whether any measurable changes had been made.

Results

The established goal was to improve the leadership domain by 5% on a 100% scale across the Vizient Central APP Improvement Community cohort by the end of 2019. The cohort surpassed that goal by capturing a 21% improvement in building an APP leadership structure. Members of the improvement community were also able to make improvements in eight of the nine domains (Table 1).

Table 1. Factors assessed per domain, baseline score and notable improvement

Domain	Factors assessed	Central APP IC baseline aggregate score	Collective Central APP IC improvement
Inclusive culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memberships on governance structure Consistency in communication and education for both physicians and APPs Incentives to build teams 	78%	Increased by 10 percentage points to an aggregate score of 88%
Leadership structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership structure for APPs Functions of leadership roles 	10%	Increased by 21 percentage points to an aggregate score of 31%
Orientation and onboarding process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment process for APPs Onboarding processes for APPs both new to the practice and new to the organization 	11%	Increased by 37 percentage points to an aggregate score of 48%
Credentialing and privileging process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memberships and involvement in medical staff Processes for granting privileges (new and reappointment) 	26%	Increased by 26 percentage points to an aggregate score of 52%
Competency assessment process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process for measuring inpatient competencies Process for measuring competency in the ambulatory setting Professional involvement in measuring competencies Frequency of measuring competencies Consistency in processes among physicians and APPs 	61%	Increased by 31 percentage points to an aggregate score of 92%
Compensation methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistency in methodology for APPs Consistency in benefits and contracts throughout the system Incentive structure 	85%	No change; sustained 85%
Scope of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scheduling processes for clinics Types of patients APPs can see Nonprovider tasks for which APPs are responsible Direct patient care expectations Granting full scope of practice privileges Granting privileges that fall out of scope 	79%	Increased by 1 percentage point to an aggregate score of 80%
Productivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes for tracking productivity for APPs (inpatient and outpatient) Work expectations for APPs 	84%	Increased by 12 percentage points to an aggregate score of 96%
Billing practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Billing practices for inpatients and outpatients Consistency throughout the system 	70%	Increased by 7 percentage points to an aggregate score of 77%

Abbreviations: APP = advanced practice provider; IC = improvement community.

Improvement community learnings

For participating members, the improvement community provided a much-needed focus on APP leadership, and encouraged them to consider APP experiences in ways they hadn't before. In addition, the valid and actionable data from the Clinical Team Insights' clinical workforce assessments facilitated conversations that led to overall restructuring, including making APPs a vital part of leadership.

"We are excited about the changes we've seen. We think the data collection was key, and we're trying to pool our resources to ensure that APPs are working at top of license."

Cherry Frame

Advanced practice registered nurse
Reid Health

At Lima Memorial Health System, Jeff Utz, executive director, shared that the improvement community provided the catalyst to engage its large APP population in leadership opportunities. "This project enabled us to prioritize when it came to our APPs. Our recent inclusion of APPs into our mid-staff executive committee happened when we considered them from a medical staff perspective. We have a large APP community, and that inclusion has been very important. Bringing them into our conversations earlier, and more routinely, is now the norm for us."

Yvonne Culpepper, chief operating officer and chief nursing officer at Hendricks Regional Health, emphasized the importance of culture change. "Being intentional about inclusive culture paid big dividends for several members in terms of their APP engagement. For instance, some members looked at how they communicate with APPs, how they position their educational offerings and how APPs are engaged in committee work. Most found that their structures were not as inclusive as they should be, and that their organization lacked consistency in how it engaged APPs."

"The improvement community opened our eyes to a lot of things," said Utz. "We started looking at where APPs were included and where they weren't. We've added an APP to every executive committee, and we make sure they're receiving all communications. By doing this, we are building inclusiveness and changing our culture."

Members also noted that the focus on APP engagement positively affected physicians and helped to build stronger overall teams. Thinking about engagement during orientation and onboarding helped members to avoid erecting invisible barriers between physicians and APPs from the outset.

"Originally, we didn't have a lot of systemwide training," said Utz. "We've now developed our own training program to ensure that our providers have the tools they need to be successful. New graduates have a comprehensive, one-to-one working relationship with a physician preceptor, and are also paired with an APP within the organization."

"We really worked hard to encourage APPs to attend medical staff education offerings, which in the past was only for physicians," said Jill Kidwell, director of medical practice management from Memorial Health. "Inviting them entailed a new approach, and the whole process helped us to think differently and be more integrated."

Dr. Thomas Hughes, a physician at Reid Health who worked on the improvement community project, added that the project helped the organization drive engagement and set the agenda for the work it needed to do. "The improvement community provided the structure we needed to prioritize APP integration and involvement."

Next steps

In 2020, the APP Improvement Community is focusing its efforts on workforce optimization, but will continue to monitor and maintain its progress in the area of leadership structures. Vizient is excited to sustain the progress of the APP Improvement Community, and encourages interested organizations to join at any time.

As the nation's largest member-driven health care performance improvement company, Vizient provides solutions and services that empower health care providers to deliver high-value care by aligning cost, quality and market performance. With analytics, advisory services and a robust sourcing portfolio, we help members improve patient outcomes and lower costs.



To learn more, contact
teaminsights@vizientinc.com.