

# The power of connection

Clinical Team Insights helps health system's APPs to break down silos and gain representation at the executive level

## Nebraska Medicine

Nebraska Medicine is the most comprehensive health network in the region, with a large academic tertiary hospital, a community hospital, more than 1,000 physicians, 400 advanced practice providers and 40 clinics in the Omaha area.

## Challenge

Nearly 40% of Vizient Clinical Team Insights program participants do not have an identified leader for advanced practice providers (APPs), according to a 2019 Clinical Team Insights assessment. Nebraska Medicine's APPs have been providing essential patient care across the enterprise for over 30 years. But like many organizations, the lack of standard processes and procedures for APPs across the system led to duplicative effort and inefficiencies. APPs reported to three different entities with different funding streams, compensation models, job descriptions and role expectations. APPs lacked representation at the executive level, were siloed in the various units and departments they served, and often reported to administrative and/or nursing leaders who were not fully focused on their unique needs and untapped potential.

## Interventions

Building on what they had learned from networking and resources provided by Vizient's Clinical Team Insights (formerly the Center for Advancing Provider Practices or CAP2™) and with extensive APP input, Nebraska Medicine began in 2014 to develop a director-led Office of Advanced Practice to provide integrated leadership and strategic focus for the more than 300 APPs serving the patients of Nebraska Medicine. The office would report to both the chief medical officer and chief nursing officer while APPs would report to a single clinical enterprise through their existing departments and units. The success of this new approach depended on creating communication channels, building bridges and providing insights to organization leaders to inform decisions that impact APPs.

When Chief Nursing Officer Sue Nuss, MBA, PhD, RN, CENP, invited Lead APP for Oncology Risa Zimmerman, MBA, MPAS, PA-C, DFAAPA, to the annual CAP2 conference in 2015, Zimmerman had no idea how much her life would change. Zimmerman had been a frontline clinician at Nebraska Medicine since 1992, but the speakers, presentations and peers at the CAP2 conference opened a window to professional and leadership development and Zimmerman knew instantly that she wanted to be involved. Recruitment had begun for the first director of the

*“At first I was concerned about leaving clinical practice, but I realized I could touch many more patients’ lives by maximizing the impact of all our APPs who deliver care every day than I ever could have in my role as an individual PA.”*

**Risa Zimmerman**  
 Director of the Office of Advanced Practice

Office of Advanced Practice and Zimmerman’s mentor had a hunch she was the right person for the job. Zimmerman was named the inaugural director of the Office of Advanced Practice in 2016.

One of Zimmerman’s first activities was to solicit feedback from APPs across the organization about their concerns and ideas. As Zimmerman listened to and shadowed APPs across the enterprise, one common theme grabbed her attention: these highly trained, skilled and motivated professionals had very limited leadership development opportunities. This was demotivating to the staff and a major lost opportunity for the organization. The organizational development team in human resources was undergoing its own transformation, and this was just the kind of project they were eager to tackle. Together, they created the tAPPING into Leadership Potential program to build both formal and informal APP leaders. The pilot program launched in 2017 to foster leadership growth for individuals who have the desire to develop as well as the support of their managers. This nine-month program includes:

- Individual mentorship from a Nebraska Medicine leader
- Leadership spotlights with executives across the enterprise
- Development surveys ([Hogan Assessments](#) and [StrengthsFinder](#))
- HR-led training in [Crucial Conversations](#)
- Topical presentations, readings and discussions (e.g., [reality-based approach to leadership](#), wellness, vulnerability, accountability)
- Personalized check-ins from the director of the Office of Advanced Practice

Twenty-seven APPs have completed the tAPPING program through the first three annual cohorts. The fourth cohort was delayed due to COVID-19 but will launch in early 2021.

## Results

The Office of Advanced Practice is transforming how APPs contribute to and function within Nebraska Medicine by forming powerful connections (see Figure 1):

- With organizational leadership, ranging from the executive level to front-line leaders. Like many medical centers, Nebraska Medicine is a complex organization with multiple entities and a complex leadership structure. The office provides connective tissue to help APPs succeed in this complex environment and support the organization’s goals.
- With individual APPs, both by providing leadership and responding to their needs.
- With other clinicians, especially physicians and nurses who work together with APPs to deliver care.
- With internal resources such as human resources, which provides internal expertise on what funding and support is needed.
- With Vizient peers across the country through Clinical Team Insights’ annual conferences, online community and one-on-one relationships.

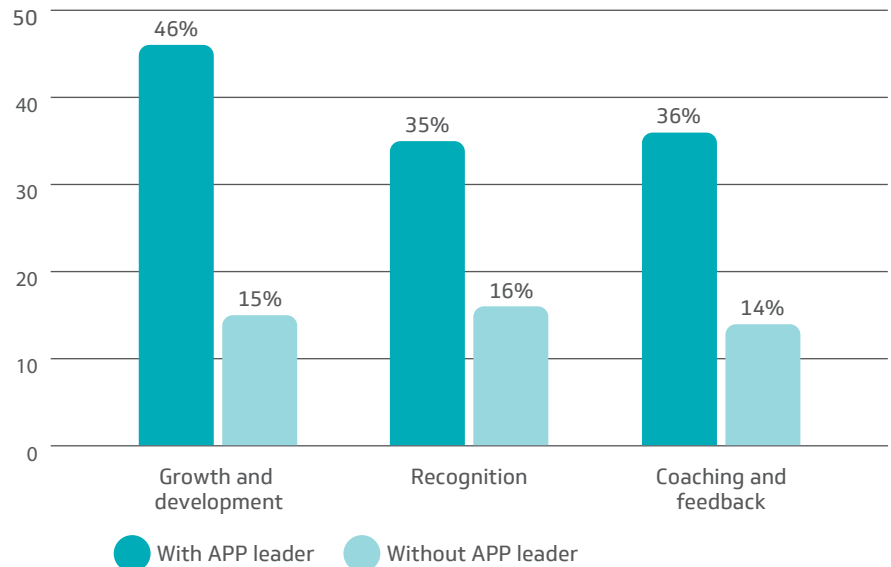
Early evidence of the impact of this new approach has emerged from the tAPPING program. Participants who completed the program reported enhanced self-awareness, confidence and engagement. Six participants have moved into newly created APP supervisor roles. Internal research has shown that APPs who report to APPs show markedly higher engagement compared to APPs who report to non-APPs (see Figure 2). Other program participants serve in leadership roles

**Figure 1. Providing connective tissue among multiple entities**



on committees and in projects. Every APP can be an informal leader in his or her clinical team as he or she applies the skills and insights from the program.

**Figure 2. APP engagement is enhanced by APP leadership**



### Lessons learned

Powered by Vizient Clinical Team Insights, the Office of Advanced Practice is maximizing the impact of APPs from the bedside to the executive suite. These changes will enable Nebraska Medicine to move forward in a rapidly changing environment, making a positive impact for staff, patients and the community.

### Clinical Team Insights

Ensuring effective and efficient care delivery is essential to meet today's value-based health care demands. Advanced practice providers, including physician assistants and advanced practice registered nurses, are an integral part of the clinical team and are projected to continue to grow and expand. Health care organizations benefit from creating an infrastructure to support the clinical care team and ensure each clinician is working to the top of their scope of practice. Clinical Team Insights takes a data-driven approach to identify opportunities for improvement within your organizational structure and operations.



For more information, contact the Vizient Clinical Insights Team at [teaminsights@vizientinc.com](mailto:teaminsights@vizientinc.com).

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.