

What is Patient-Centered Care?

By Virginia Barzan, C.A.E., MAFP Executive Vice President

Sometimes I'm a patient, not an EVP, and unfortunately as I grow older, I seem to be in the patient role more and more often. As the guest contributor to our Medical Home column, I thought I would take this opportunity to share my perspective of patient-centeredness.

I'm looking forward to a Medical Home in my future. I see little bits of what I think it will look like in my own clinic now. My medications are reviewed each time I visit, and my family physician goes does a great job of listening to my concerns, reviewing important preventive issues, answering questions and providing me with take-home information. I feel the most productive visit for both of us is when she has reviewed my history so that she will focus on me, my face, body language, and words, rather than on the computer or the chart. I always appreciate being able to have the preliminary discussion with my clothes on. And I was grateful when she arranged to have my colonoscopy scheduled before I left the office – that's the type of call I might have avoided making later on my own!

Here are a few things I'd like to see in my future Medical Home. When I get lab results back in the mail, and my physician recommends a follow-up test, I wish that someone at the clinic would also contact me about making the appointment and make sure that the lab orders are ready when I get there. If I'm worried about what the lab results mean, I'd like to feel comfortable contacting the clinic for more information. I'd love it if this all happened via e-mail! I'd also be honored to serve on a community advisory board and to fill out customer surveys for the clinic coordinating my Medical Home.

The MAFP Position Paper on the Medical Home Outlined Six Core Principles:

1. Enhanced Access
2. Comprehensive Care
3. Coordination of Care
4. The Personal Physician
5. Quality & Safety
6. Patient-Centeredness

Doctor David Hutchinson emphasizes that well-coordinated care is one of the most important goals of "patient-centeredness." He constructed a list of practical considerations for clinics working toward achievement of Medical Home

principles. Here are a few of them that also pertain to patient-centeredness and reflect some of my thoughts:

- Do personal physicians in your clinic process all incoming information about their patients?
- Will this information, and the follow-up recommendations generated by it, be reliably inserted into easily accessible parts of the patient's chart? Will team partners view it?
- Are problem lists, medication lists, and care plans reliably updated from clinic visits and from outside provider visits?
- Does your clinic employ well-designed systems for patient contact and follow-up?
- Do you construct and share formal Care Plans for patients with chronic conditions and multiple (team) providers?
- How does your clinic routinely assure patient education and understanding of diagnoses, recommendations, and next steps? Can patients access providers with questions?

Doctor Hutchinson further says, "Each of the other main tenets of Medical Home (such as dedication to quality and improvement, enhanced access, and emphasis on relationships between patients and personal physicians) are all GOALS of patient-centeredness or are ways of being patient-centered. We have 'patient-centeredness' as its own main pillar in the structure of the medical home to help emphasize that fact, and also to remind us of WHY those are goals and about how we should orient our thinking and decisions. As we construct high-functioning Medical Homes, the tenet of 'patient-centeredness' should stimulate our thoughts about:

- building redesign for customer use
- green-and-healthy construction
- user-friendly scheduling
- electronic and telephonic and office visit access
- confidentiality and security systems
- utilization of Care Coordinators for patients with multiple needs
- patient advisory boards
- formal improvement processes
- maintenance of informed relationships of trust between patients and their personal physicians and care team members.

'Patient-centeredness' means much more than "the patient comes first", or "everything we do and decide is ultimately for the good of the patient." It means that all of our policies, routines, structures, habits, resources, systems, communication patterns, inter-facility networking, and clinical decisions are actively driven by the needs and preferences of patients and community, with their direction and advice. It's a philosophy that infuses everything we do, build, and formulate."

It feels exciting, as a patient, to be such a focus for improvement in health care.

Comments and ideas from members are welcome at vbarzan@mafp.org or dhutchinson@dfprp.org.