THREE CHALLENGES:
Turning Primary Care Obstacles into Opportunities
As a provider, you know that primary care is challenging. It often requires you to care for increasing numbers of patients with complicated conditions, meet changing regulatory requirements, and manage and motivate a staff that’s ready for whatever lies ahead.

But these challenges don’t have to derail your practice’s success. Meeting them head on with innovative information solutions can empower you to provide more effective, comprehensive primary care, while also giving you a better work-life balance.

Following, we take the top three challenges in primary care and explain how specialty-specific tools can help you meet them by achieving better clinical outcomes, improving population health, lowering costs and increasing practice profitability, while still providing compassionate care to patients.
1: Doing more with less

Perhaps the most pressing challenge facing family physicians today is that you’re being called on to treat more patients with more-complicated problems. The increased demand is caused by several factors, including:

- **Better access to care.** The Affordable Care Act (ACA) has provided access to care to 32 million people who were previously under- or completely uninsured.¹

- **Diminishing supply.** Thousands of physicians are reaching retirement age, yet the demand for primary care physicians is projected to grow from 212,500 full-time equivalents (FTEs) in 2010 to 241,200 FTEs in 2020, a 14% increase. Yet in recent years, fewer new medical school students are choosing to focus on primary care.²

- **Aging of the U.S. population.** The number of persons age 65 or older is expected to nearly double from 39.6 million in 2009 to about 72.1 million in 2030.³

- **Evolving needs of primary care patients.** 75% of typical primary care visits today are for multiple chronic illnesses. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) projects that by the year 2020, 81 million Americans will have multiple chronic health conditions.⁴

As millions of people turn to their family physicians for the care they need, the opportunity for primary care providers to improve population health while growing their bottom line is bigger than ever before. But for many providers with overbooked caseloads, increasing their number of patients can only be achieved by finding new ways to improve practice efficiency.

Having the right systems and processes in place to improve the patient experience, maximize providers’ time in the office, eliminate administrative redundancies and simplify billing are all keys to taking advantage of the emerging opportunity for primary care providers.

Implementing electronic healthcare solutions can empower practices to operate more efficiently. But for these tools to deliver, they need primary care-specific features, such as preloaded clinical templates for myriad conditions, accurate speech-to-text functionality and mobile capabilities to expedite documentation. Greenway PrimeSUITE®, an integrated practice management and EHR solution, includes features that have proven effective in thousands of primary care practices for decades.

“PrimeSUITE has a physician-friendly setup with a lot of templates that are well designed and make documentation quite easy,” said Ken R. Buczynski, MD, of Wellspring Family Medicine, Oakland, MD. “It helps me see my patients and meet the requirements I have but doesn’t require a lot of maintenance.”

In addition to improving clinical documentation and efficiency, truly comprehensive IT solutions also prepare practices for upcoming regulatory changes and primary care’s unique reporting requirements.
Emerging value-based care models aim to track improved patient outcomes, which fits with many primary care goals. Yet they also pose a new challenge: adding specific documentation and reporting requirements to your workload.

Take disease and immunization registries, for example. These registries track the clinical care and outcomes of a defined population to support patients with chronic diseases. Clinicians can consult immunization registries to inform vaccination decisions or review aggregated data to guide population health efforts and reduce vaccine-preventable diseases.

Registries can help providers enhance care coordination, deliver better care and improve patient outcomes by:

- Supporting patient compliance by flagging missed appointments or overdue immunizations
- Using filters to identify patients most in need of intervention
- Developing clinician reports
- Managing patient follow-up
- Generating care-planning tools for individual patients

As the movement toward patient-centered medical homes (PCMH) and other initiatives centered on primary care gain momentum, you’re likely to play a big part in bringing this information to the table. Additionally, federal initiatives such as meaningful use (MU) 2014 require providers to submit electronic data to immunization registries on an ongoing basis.

To realize the benefits of registries and receive funds from incentive programs, physicians must deliver timely, appropriate data to the registries. This presents a challenge for busy staff who already struggle to maintain up-to-date patient records, but it also creates an opportunity to establish electronic connections that give providers access to all of the appropriate health information on record for patients.

Rather than burdening staff with additional “to-dos,” clinical exchange solutions enable practices to share information with just a few clicks of the mouse. For example, connecting a practice’s EHR to a state immunization registry eliminates the need for staff to print, mail or fax vaccination records and allows providers to access patients’ immunization histories quickly and easily.

Beyond immunization registries, truly interoperable solutions can provide seamless, secure data exchanges between practices and other entities in the healthcare community — including other providers, hospitals, insurance providers, labs and more.

Greenway’s interoperability solution, PrimeEXCHANGE®, connects practices to more than 1,000 members of the healthcare ecosystem, including those using IT solutions from Epic, Cerner, Meditech and more. All connections flow through a centralized exchange platform, which means only one connection needs to be made between an external party and all Greenway® customers. This leads to lower costs and higher return on investment for customers.

In addition to giving clinicians a comprehensive look at a patient’s health record, PrimeEXCHANGE enables office staff to spend less time on administrative tasks and more time focusing on preparing your practice for the future.


3. Putting the right team in place

As your practice prepares to take advantage of new opportunities, assessing and evolving staff responsibilities to meet present and future needs will help you succeed.

For example, you can help your practice keep up with value-based medicine and increased automation by updating office procedures to focus on increased efficiency, quality data capture, better revenue results and improved patient engagement. You can start by:

Developing a team atmosphere

As reimbursements become increasingly tied to performance and patient outcomes, success will depend on your practice functioning as a team. Make sure all staff members understand regulatory requirements and their roles in helping your practice meet them. Remember to celebrate your successes as a team.

Making room for care coordinators

A care coordinator facilitates care across all elements of the broader health system, including specialty care, hospitals, home health, community services, patients’ support systems and, of course, patients themselves. Adding a care coordinator to your staff can help improve patient outcomes during critical transition periods.

Matching skills sets to current needs

Assess staff skills to determine whose roles can evolve to fit your current needs. For example, as high-deductible insurance plans shift more payment responsibility to patients, front-office staff will be responsible for collecting more upfront payments and copays from patients. Determine who’s best suited for this role — this may involve a shift in resources or roles, including moving a billing specialist near check-in or check-out.

Increasing technical training

Success with ICD-10 and various initiatives such as meaningful use and physician quality reporting system (PQRS) hinges on two things — the care you provide and your practice’s ability to document, track and report care electronically. Investing in computers, software and ICD-10 training for your staff will help you meet those demands. Greenway’s EHR-based solutions are ICD-10-ready, including embedded medical vocabulary mapping to both ICD-10 and ICD-9 codes. Properly equipping your staff will pay dividends as healthcare technology becomes vital to practice success.
Each physician and practice is different. Choose a partner who treats you that way. As a primary care physician, you’re in a unique position to help the healthcare industry move toward improved care, enhanced population health and lower costs — while growing your bottom line by receiving incentive payments and seeing more patients in less time.

But to realize those opportunities, you must overcome a number of hurdles. To see why thousands of your peers have selected Greenway Health™ to help them transform challenges into opportunities, visit greenwayhealth.com or call (866) 242-3805.

2. Health Resources and Services Administration. Protecting the Supply and Demand for Primary Care Practitioners through 2020. bhpr.hrsa.gov/healthworkforce/supplydemand/usworkforce/