

Diabetic Retinopathy

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### Leadership/Planning

Saunders Medical Center was established to improve the health of our community. With a vision to be the healthcare provider of choice for the citizens of Saunders County, it is important that we develop and maintain a reputation for innovation and leadership in rural healthcare services. Saunders Medical Center is committed to a tradition of excellence through leadership in the provision of quality medical services and health education for the people of Saunders County. Physicians, nurses, and staff are committed to their mission of improving the health of the people of Saunders County and beyond by providing convenient and timely access to high quality comprehensive care with exceptional service and compassion. As a unified medical center in Saunders County, it is imperative that leaders and frontline staff engage in the always changing healthcare industry. We are committed to making a difference and creating programs to help produce a community of well-being. We do this by identifying areas that need improvement, which in turn helps create goals, improve outcomes, prevent harm, and close gaps.

Saunders Medical Center has gifted healthcare providers and a positive and supportive leadership team. Working together, the team acknowledged the need to improve the health of our diabetic patient population by engaging these patients in their care and shepherding them to complete their diabetic eye exams annually. In line with the organization's strategic plan to improve community wellness and promote healthy living for individuals with chronic health conditions, Saunders Medical Center made the strategic decision to move forward with a collaborative effort to explore ways to improve these screening numbers.

### Process of Identifying Need

Diabetic retinopathy is an eye condition that can cause vision loss and blindness in people who have diabetes. This complication is caused by damage to the blood vessels in the tissue at the back of the eye (retina). Poorly controlled blood sugar is a risk factor. Diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of blindness in working-age adults. Ninety-five percent of vision loss due to diabetic retinopathy can be prevented with early detection. Saunders Medical Center identified thru claims data from value-based care agreements that diabetic patients were not getting their annual diabetic eye exams completed at a satisfactory rate. Together with the providers, clinical health coaches and leadership it was determined that the team explore ways to engage patients and improve these rates. To gather information, the team spoke to many other clinics throughout the state of Nebraska and other diabetic care professionals. This was crucial when identifying this issue and planning for change. Together we are striving to make our community well and by evaluating this gap in patient care, we can drive our team to make a difference.

The team at Saunders Medical Center discussed findings and requested a demonstration of a device called the RetinaVue care delivery model. This RetinaVue imager is a smart camera that offers an automated retina image. This device allows primary healthcare providers to transfer images to be reviewed by ophthalmologists and results back to the primary care provider within one business day. It was then determined that this would be the best option to move forward with our goal of increasing our number of diabetic patients with a retina screening.

### Process Improvement Methods

After identifying this need and deciding to move forward with the purchase of the RetniaVue device, the team reviewed current compliance rates and set goals to meet those value-

based care standards. To achieve this goal, the team engaged in education and training of all clinic staff and providers on the use of the device. Using PDSA cycle helped identify if the changes would be successful and identified potential areas of concern.

Initially, the team reviewed the compliance scores for eye exams and used these scores as baseline data for our facility. Saunders Medical Center had an eye exam completion rate of 45% in the year 2020. It was identified that further education was needed for our clinic staff and providers on this measure and how it relates to the care of our diabetic population. Furthermore, patients also needed education on reasonable expectations and engagement in their overall health and diabetic care needs. The team had several different ideas for improvement opportunities. Education appeared to be a major gap. The team worked hard to provide clear and beneficial information to staff. The quality team and clinical health coaches were responsible for educating the medical staff at monthly meetings and this spread to nursing education at their monthly meetings.

After the clinical staff and providers received education and training on the RetinaVue device a new policy and procedure pertaining to the use of the RetinaVue imager. It was important to create a standardized method of use to ensure quality images were captured and results received back in a timely manner. It was also critical that the providers and staff could talk to the importance of the screening. The other two areas that were of great importance was the inclusion of our billing and coding staff and IT department. Their inclusion helped with understanding the cost that the patient may incur and what kind of coverage was available for this service on many different plans. The use of appropriate claims was vitally important to capture that this service was performed. Our IT staff were able to ensure we had the needed connectivity and capability to implement the use of the device at our facility.

After implementing the policy and procedure and patient education we moved forward with the utilization of the device. When patients present for appointments within the clinic and the eye exam gap is identified, the nurse and or the provider discuss this with the patient to see if they would be willing to complete the exam while they are in the office. If the patient declined, they were asked if we could help set up an appointment with an ophthalmologist of their choice.

### Results

The utilization of this device has had a major impact on the diabetic care we provide our community. Saunders Medical Center has gone from a compliance rate of 45% in 2020 to 73% in 2021. We are awaiting our scores for 2022. We have been able to identify diabetic retinopathy in several patients and get them referred for ongoing care and potentially saving their sight.

With any new change, it is important to monitor for compliance. The Director of Clinics and Director of Quality continue to monitor these rates monthly and work with health coaches, nurses and providers to close any of these care gaps.

Setting expectations and goals with the patient in their plan of care is key to this project's success. Our initial goal was to reach 62% compliance and we have been excited to be able to achieve a rate over that initial goal.

### Lessons Learned, Replicability, Sustainability

This project has provided an increased understanding of the importance of eye exams for the diabetic patients Saunders Medical Center. Improving this understanding has influenced provider and staff engagement in the care of our patients. After seeing much improvement with these rates, continued education for providers, staff and patients is crucial to sustain this change.

Providers and staff will continue to receive a minimum of three hours of continuing education regarding diabetes, which in turn, will improve their knowledge on providing patient education.

By accomplishing our goal, the staff at Saunders Medical Center have demonstrated their dedication to improving the wellness of our community. Increasing the compliance rates for the diabetic patient population receiving diabetic eye care has made a huge impact in the care of these patients. Not only does this improve the health of our patients, but it reduces costs that are associated with potential loss of sight and other related diseases of the eye.

Spreading the news of success throughout the facility through the monthly Quality Newsletter was a way to not only showcase the improvement efforts our team worked hard on, but also to educate and provide a resource to all staff at Saunders Medical Center. When all staff understand improvement efforts being worked on, it increases employee engagement and offers support from all areas of the facility. This also truly reflects how hard our team at Saunders Medical Center has worked and how dedicated they are to improving the health and well-being of our community.

An important lesson learned throughout this project is that the care of the diabetic patient goes way beyond medication and getting an A1c. Providing staff and providers with the tools they need to successfully treat our patients is the ultimate goal of Saunders Medical Center. Continued education for the evolving healthcare industry is necessary for both providers and patients to sustain success.

For other facilities to replicate this project and be successful, it is important to get leadership, provider, and frontline staff buy-in. Continued education is critical for sustainability, so offering and providing support for continual learning engages staff and allows them to gain

knowledge in this always changing healthcare industry. We are continuing improvement efforts by sharing our success with other facilities, both within our ACO and external to this group.

In conclusion, our collaborative team at Saunders Medical Center is devoted to following our mission by providing our patients the highest quality care possible. We are passionate about prevention, promoting healthy lives, and making an impact in the care of our patients.