Successful Practices in Accountable Care:
Aledade

Company Profile

Name: Aledade

Headquarters Location: Bethesda, MD

Year Founded: 2014

Number of Employees: approximately 200

Services Offered: ACO administration, population health tool, practice transformation specialists, provider workgroups, legal support, tool kits

Unique Feature: blend of technology and healthcare company

ACO Demographics: 18 with 230,000 attributed Medicare beneficiaries

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Since their founding in 2014, Aledade has focused on independent primary care. The independent nature of practices is fundamental to what they see as the ability to create change. Aledade has chosen to work with FQHCs because, although they are independent, as a model they are complex and provide a wide range of services. In the company's experience, many health centers have already embarked on the work of improving the quality of care. It is because health centers now have a focus on the cost of care that Aledade is determined in their work with FQHCs to make them financially viable in an ever-changing payment environment.

By empowering and supporting primary care providers like FQHCs, Aledade sees the path towards providing the best quality care to patients and the lowest cost. They support those goals by engaging in practice transformation through a variety of methods. All of Aledade's methods are centered on better understanding through education and data. Aledade does this by providing FQHCs a unique blend of technology and health care to inform their

decisions and help health centers better understand their patient population and, as a result, make decisions that help change the way care is delivered.

The Need For Education

As Aledade suggests, the way health care is delivered and paid for is constantly evolving. However, changing the way that health centers get paid also requires changing the way health centers operate and think. Aledade has found this change creates a strong need for information sharing and communication not just at the executive level, but at all levels of a health center. What happens in the exam room has strong effects on what happens at all levels of a health center's operation and financial performance. Being able to impact what happens in the exam room begins with being able to share the right information with the providers. In Aledade's experience working with FQHCs, one of the biggest challenges they have is getting information directly to the providers, particularly because so many health

centers have multiple sites. Specifically, they have faced challenges with navigating the organizational structure and negotiating demanding priorities. However, with the exception of the communication piece, many of the health centers Aledade works with are participating in programs that make them well suited to embark on this practice transformation journey. In their experience, health centers are engaging in programs focused on care management and improving quality measures typically considered in ACOs, which sets them up to be successful in such programs as compared to larger hospital groups or even private practices.

One of the ways in which Aledade addresses the communication challenge is by working with state Primary Care Associations (PCAs). The PCAs are a known entity to the health centers and the providers, so working with the PCAs allows Aledade to bridge the gap in knowledge and gain perspective on the environment in which health centers operate. They provide Aledade with expert advice on how health centers function, the realistic challenges they face (a reality check of sorts), and the resources needed. The PCAs also help Aledade approach the health centers with a provider-focus, which is key for managing the changes necessary. Aledade recognizes that providers are the core of the services health centers provide and that focusing on their needs, processes, and outcomes can impact the health center overall.

Annual Wellness Visits

A necessary change that Aledade highly encourages all health centers to consider as they embark on the journey towards accountable care is increasing the number of Annual Wellness Visits (AWVs) they provide each year to their Medicare fee for service patients. Even if a health center is currently doing AWVs, having a more robust plan for AWVs is essential to understanding and providing better care. The AWV Aledade recommends is

not about checking boxes or a pro-forma encounter but rather provides a comprehensive understanding of the individual patient – their preventative screenings, social determinants of health, medicine reconciliation, etc. This visit establishes a baseline for the patient's health status and needs. With a clear baseline, providers can develop care plans that address the most pressing issues for the patients and improve overall health. In those health centers that implemented AWVs, fall risk screen increased from approximately 25% to over 90%. They also saw increases in clinical depression screenings and follow-up, pneumococcal vaccinations for patients 65 plus years, colorectal cancer screenings, and high blood pressure screenings and subsequent control, demonstrating the value of AWVs. The AWV is also a way for health centers to clarify and improve their billing and coding. As a result of proper billing for over 5,000 AWVs, one group of health centers was able to increase their bottom line by over $1 million collectively, leading to increased quality of care to more patients down the line. Aledade finds that issues in coding are a significant flaw that impedes progress and a challenge that many providers confront as the way they are paid charges. It is essential to have accurate codes and to consider the activities in the exam room as part of a larger system.

Data For Better Health

With accurate codes, health centers gain a better understanding of their population, which is the first step in improving their population's health. However, Aledade states simply having data (coding and quality) is not enough. The data must be actionable in order to improve upon it. Aledade provides health centers with a dashboard and toolkits to engage in robust analysis. By engaging in analysis at the provider and health center level, health center teams are able to understand what the data means, how to implement better work flows for better outcomes, and the larger picture of what care and payment can

create, such as in the case of Monongahela Valley Association of Health Centers. Monongahela Valley was able to connect to the West Virginia Health Information Exchange and receive information on hospital admissions, transfers, and emergency department activity. With this information, they were able to transform their transitions of care (TOC) with patients. They can now follow up with patients who were in the Emergency Department leading to fewer admissions and a reduction in readmissions.

Aledade has monthly meetings with health center clinical leads in which they use data to drive the conversation. During the meeting, they collaboratively review the data to get a real-time picture of how the health centers are doing and what they can do to improve. This one-on-one approach allows health center staff to participate in targeted transformation and stay on top of changes. It allows the health center to dig deep on the practical and operational implications of what they are doing. By seeing

the effect, health centers are able to change the cause and enhance the care they are providing to those who need it most.

By improving the data they collect, understanding that data, and communicating changes in a clear manner, a health center can embark upon the process of improvement with greater success. Aledade also provides practice transformation specialists that visit health centers and work with the providers one-on-one. The specialists embed in the health center to meet them where they are. They also support pre-existing provider work groups by creating specialized data-driven toolkits. The toolkits help health centers to improve their processes and include everything from scripts for the front-desk to supporting electronic health record use . With this support, the transformation and improvement key to any health center's accountable care efforts can be achieved.

This document was produced by the National Association of Community Health Centers.

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