



# 3-minute case study: The optimized medical assistant

By Brenna Mayer | March 28, 2017

**R**esearchers have identified top performers on key financial and clinical metrics across the athenahealth network – and are uncovering the innovations that drive their success. Here’s a snapshot of one tactic on the road to lower cost, higher value care.

## The problem

Lynn Joffe, M.D., of Colorado’s DTC Family Health and Walk-In wants to talk with her patients because, she says, “the joy of medicine is in the interaction.” Yet her time with patients was increasingly spent checking off quality metrics for value-based reimbursement. “We wanted ... to focus on the patient and the behavioral changes that need to be made,” says Joffe, “not whether they need an A1c [screening] or not.”

## The solution

To ensure patient care stays at the center of the practice, DTC optimizes its use of a key resource: medical assistants. Joffe and her partners took a look

at their exam templates and made sure each included specific guidelines for 10 to 15 common diagnoses – recipes for what she calls “cookbook medicine.”

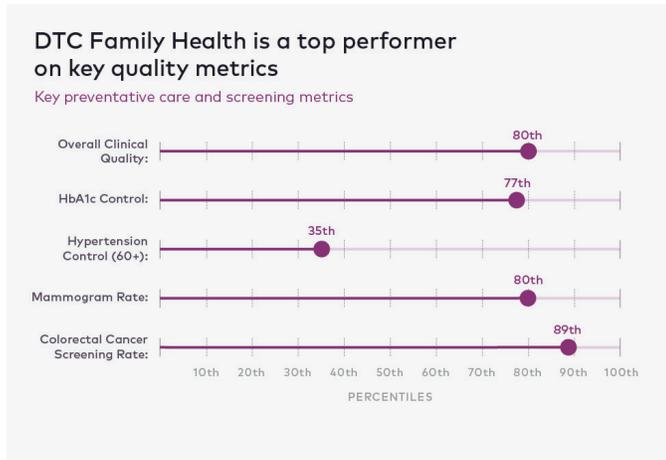
Then, MAs follow the templates to determine the needs of each patient and fulfill many of them – from vaccinations and prescription refills to medication compliance records and sample collection, as well as prepping the patient for specific exams – all before the provider even enters the room.

While all providers have individual preferences regarding how they conduct exams, Joffe says, “We try to be as uniform as possible ... when it comes to the standard measures, we’re all pretty much consistent.” This consistency has led to a marked decrease in frustration on the part of MAs, taking the guesswork out of what a particular provider would prefer for a given exam.

Completing this work before the provider enters the picture allows DTC’s physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners to talk to the patient at the moment of care, discussing significant issues that speak directly to the patient’s chief complaint or condition.

# The outcome

DTC is a high performer in quality metrics across athenahealth's network. By empowering MAs to provide a higher level of care as they prepare each patient, as well as taking care of documenting quality metrics, DTC's providers can focus on patients, not documentation. And that improves outcomes for both providers and patients.



*Brenna Mayer is a contributing writer for athenaInsight. Data analysis and research by Stewart Richardson, David Clain, and Erica Granor.*



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