Top 10 athenaInsight stories of 2018

By Alison Pereto | December 24, 2018

For U.S. healthcare systems, 2018's tumultuous ride has become the new normal.

Practices of all sizes navigated physician shortages, the continuing adjustment to value-based care, the long wait for new CMS rules, diminishing reimbursements, and rural hospitals closing at an alarming rate.

Amid the tumult, athenaInsight dug into healthcare's bright spots and pain points and shared real-time data from athenahealth's network of more than 120,000 providers. With tactics, data, innovations, and trends, the list below showcases some of this year's proven methods to fill care gaps and help practices thrive.

Here are athenaInsight's top stories from 2018, with an eye for what's to come in 2019.

1. How to build and sustain a 'capable' healthcare system

New research from athenahealth revealed healthcare systems can prevent physician burnout – and the key is

a metric called "capability." In this survey, more than 1,600 physicians shared whether they had the tools, resources, and latitude to succeed at their jobs. Those who said yes to all three worked at capable organizations.

The business case for capability is strong: Physicians at high-capability practices were twice as satisfied with their work, two-thirds more loyal, 36 percent less burned out, and 10 percent more productive. Even better? The tactics that led to their success are within reach.

2. Healthcare's missing layer

In York City, Pennsylvania, the rate of low-birthweight babies was higher than it was in York County – and Family First Health set out to find out why.

By pairing community health workers with at-risk pregnant women, Family First improved outcomes and began building a network of support for new mothers. In this photo essay, meet some of the women who are bringing care right to the patient's home.

3. Infographic: 4 steps to better ROI

Nearly 30 percent of all appointments go unused, and patients are more likely than ever to leave a provider with debt. But practices have tools at their disposal to acquire and retain patients – and secure profitability.

From portals to workflow improvements, this infographic offers tactics to engage patients, prevent bad debt, and free providers up to deliver care.

4. Decoding Healthcare podcast: Of llamas and interop with John Halamka

This was 2018's most popular episode of Decoding Healthcare – and it wasn't just because of the llamas.

Listen to John Halamka, M.D. and CIO of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, enjoy a lively discussion with athenaInsight's editor-in-chief John Fox, covering patient record-sharing, physician burnout, telemedicine, "ambient listening" devices, and, yes, a few farm animals.

5. A better way to track flu

January's government shutdown may seem like years ago. But those two days, during the most severe flu season in years, highlighted the need for backup infectious-disease tracking systems involving Google, Twitter, and other crowdsourced data.

As a new flu season settles in, consider the available options if the CDC isn't available – and remember, getting vaccinated decreases your chance of becoming a statistic.

6. Patient-to-patient coaching catches on

Clinicians can help a patient with physical illness, but sometimes only a peer can help emotionally.

Whether "recovery coaches" who have experienced cancer, group care with pregnant women, or online strangers supporting each other through a family member's Alzheimer's, peer coaching is filling clinical care gaps – and improving population health.

7. Infographic: What's behind long appointment lead times

Between the physician shortage and an increasingly elderly population, patients now wait three weeks or more for a medical appointment. And the longer they wait, the more likely they are to feel dissatisfied, search for a new provider, or even abandon care.

This infographic peers behind the scenes at long lead times: why they happen, what specialties are most likely to have them, and – most importantly – how to shorten them.

8. 6 steps to better care management

How does Lewis, a housebound patient with severe COPD and depression, improve enough for a healthy, cross-country drive?

He enrolled in an Intensive Outpatient Care Program (IOCP), a novel – and replicable – six-step approach designed for complex patients.

9. Interactive: Chronic conditions in America

Among four million patients, how many have diabetes and hypertension? What age group is most likely to have asthma and hyperlipidemia? Explore athenahealth's interactive data set of current trends in chronic conditions.

10. Suki, pay attention: AI assistants in the exam room

In 2018, artificial intelligence roared out of the wings with an effective solution to one of physicians' toughest pain points: documentation.

Nearly 40 percent of providers spend more than ten hours a week catching up on documentation at home - and at 15 hours, burnout rates spike. That's why voice-activated machine learning programs are showing such early success in the clinic. Physicians can turn away from their screens to the true focus: patients.

Want to keep hope alive (and doors open) through healthcare's twists and turns? Bookmark athenainsight.com and come back often. And have a joyful, healthy 2019.

Alison Pereto is senior writer at athenaInsight.

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