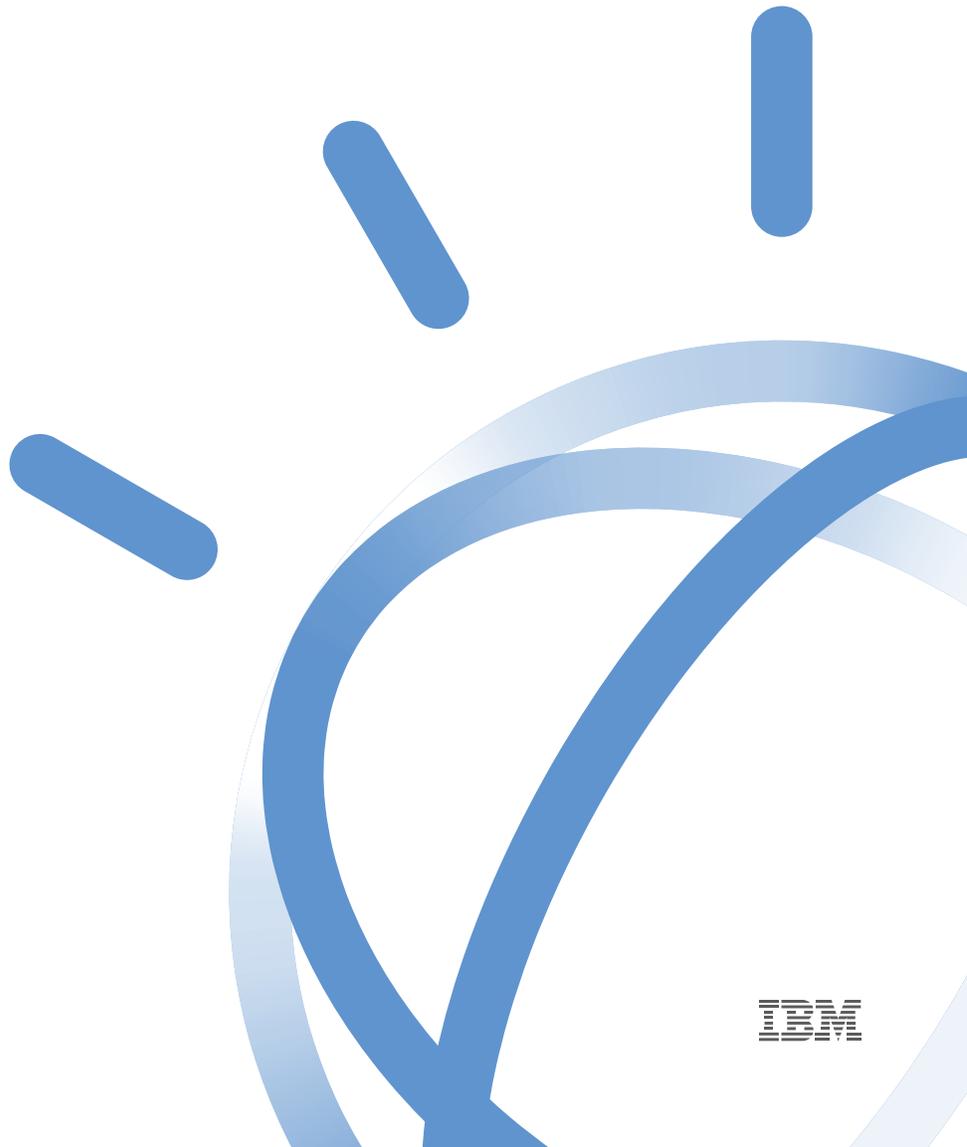# Bassett Healthcare Network

IBM

## Overview

Bassett Healthcare Network serves a 5,600 square mile region in upstate New York through six hospitals, skilled nursing facilities and other health centers.  Like many healthcare organizations, Bassett is navigating the complex transition from volume to value-based reimbursement and adopting population health management techniques as an important tool. Bassett has teamed with IBM® Watson™ Health, to help accomplish their goals in this area.

## Primary Care a Priority

Bassett recognized that its primary care network was a critical "flash point" in its strategy. Bassett Medical Group consists of more than 400 physicians and other clinicians and has experienced rapid growth. Forty-three clinicians have been hired over the past two years accompanied by physical expansion of six clinics.

Bassett adopted four related primary care objectives:

– Drive volume to utilize existing capacity and quickly ramp productivity of new clinicians
– Support pursuit of NCQA Patient-Centered Medical Home renewal recognition
– Foster overall population health management
– Support clinical quality improvement initiatives to attain maximum incentive payments

The organization determined that it needed the "right volume," not just more. That meant targeting gaps in care, concentrating on chronic needs in primary care, pediatrics, and women's health such as depression, immunizations and diabetes.

## The need for outreach

Bassett knew that effective patient outreach and engagement was critical.  If it could get non-compliant chronic patients to schedule needed visits and maintain care regimens, the medical group would drive revenue while promoting better outcomes for targeted populations.

## The solution: IBM Phytel Outreach

After considering various approaches, Bassett selected Phytel® Outreach, a "best in KLAS" designee and a core module of IBM's extensive population health management suite. Phytel Outreach deploys intelligent technology to help automate the care provider's time-consuming process of identifying patients who need recommended care and initiating customizable notifications regarding follow-up actions. The solution's capability to support a wide range of care protocols was particularly attractive to Bassett, which decided to apply it to over 20 target conditions.

Phytel Outreach integrates with an electronic medical record (EMR), financial or other information system. Bassett's GE Centricity Business system feeds data to Phytel Outreach's algorithms, which analyze patients against evidence-based guidelines and automatically generate an Outreach call. Bassett is able to achieve patient engagement at a consistency and scale exceeding that of straight human intervention.

Bassett is also using Phytel Outreach to help meet strategic quality goals, notably National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH) recognition program. The software was designed to meet specific PCMH elements and has been pre-validated by NCQA for autocredit, allowing users to bypass the NCQA documentation process for eligible elements.  Bassett now has 27 of its sites PCMH-recognized, with 23 more in process.

## Smooth implementation, rapid rollout

Bassett chose a measured approach to implementation, beginning with a pilot group of 21 clinicians. The key success metric was established up front: Booking Ratio, defined as the number of booked appointments against the allocated available slots. An important subgroup to be tracked on this ratio was new physicians to monitor their progress toward high productivity.

An early concern was potential negative patient reaction to proactive outreach. Given Bassett's service to many smaller communities, the economic and community relations hit could be severe. Throughout implementation, Bassett successfully expended considerable effort creating brochures, issuing press releases, updating its patient portal and training inbound call staff to explain and promote the service.

The pilot group exceeded management expectations for booking ratio results as well as patient and caregiver acceptance, encouraging Bassett to add more users than planned in phase two.  Successful continued expansion has brought the current level to 118.

## Results: By the numbers

The results have been impressive.  Bassett has consistently measured high booking ratios from those physicians utilizing Phytel Outreach. Physicians who have been using the solution the longest continue to achieve mid to upper 90 percent ratios compared to mid-80s for non-users. Notably, the Phytel Outreach cohort also maintained its high ratios during the "winter effect" months when the full practice plummets to the mid-70 percent range. The group's overall booked-to-available rate now stands at just under 90 percent.

Additional findings uncovered:

– Phase two clinicians began at a lower ratio than their peers and surpassed them consistently within three months. After six months, this Phytel Outreach group was booking well over 200 additional monthly visits.
– Newer physicians have achieved the desired accelerated productivity ramp. As one example, a physician generated a 104 percent booking ratio in only four months on Phytel Outreach versus his first ten months at 79 percent.

## Revenue impact

Frank Panzarella, Vice President of Operations, described the success in maximizing utilization while increasing capacity: "In March 2016, the organization registered the highest level of available hours in its history at approximately 28,000. The booking ratio was 87 percent. By comparison, the figures six months prior stood at 26,855 hours with an 85 percent ratio."

To quantify the revenue impact, Bassett analyzed its professional and facility reimbursements for the specific patients involved in the program. Total net collections attributable to Phytel Outreach patients were $1.2 million in less than a year, which the organization considers at least $400,000 greater than initial projections.

Bassett has also achieved the "right volume." Notable revenue gains have come from the pediatric population and patients between ages 50 and 69, as well as from preventive/wellness visits, asthma and hypertension treatment. All of these interventions are crucial to population heath management and are being reflected in improved quality metrics.[1]

## Doing outreach right: Patient and physician adoption

Bassett has actively cultivated patient acceptance. Martha Sunkenberg, Senior Director of Health Center Operations, noted two important barriers to overcome. First, some patients prefer other methods of contact than phone calls, prompting Bassett to look to moving to use of Phytel Outreach's text and email capabilities. Second, varying population needs make one-size-fits-all messaging less productive. Sunkenberg explained that "It is important to fine tune the message content to reflect the perspectives of different groups based on demographics, care requirements and other factors. We found the way we needed to describe the mammography screening recommendations varied by age group."

The chief provider challenge was skepticism about automation. Careful presentation of care gap data within each physician's own patient group drove realization of the magnitude and complexity to look to moving to use Phytel Outreach's text and email capabilities. Quality metrics in Bassett's dashboard "also helped doctors make the direct connection between the Outreach efforts and their own objectives and outcomes," noted Sunkenberg.

## Additional lessons learned and best practices

Bassett's leaders advise several best practices to promote success with Phytel Outreach:

– Engage physicians from the outset. "Include physician thought leaders early and often, and once up and running, immediately responding to skeptics is essential, and responding with data is powerful," said Panzarella.
– Leverage clinician desire to achieve goals such as PCMH Level 3 to overcome resistance.
– Maintain data integrity. Erroneous patient calls undermine credibility of the service.

## Future directions

Building on its success, Bassett is evaluating expansion of the program. A planned full Epic EMR implementation offers potential to combine clinical and financial information to target Phytel Outreach actions even more precisely. Bassett also intends to use Phytel Outreach in its growing School-Based Health Center program. In addition to Watson Health helping Bassett achieve auto-credit for NCQA PCMH, it is also helping the organization with a range of quality improvement initiatives, from Bassett's own Accountable Care Organization (Bassett Accountable Care Partners, LLC), to the New York State Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment Program, to various individual insurance carrier programs.

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