



*“Spotlight on Improvement” highlights real stories of current efforts, including: programs being initiated; practices being implemented; and outcomes being targeted and/or achieved. They’re an opportunity for learning from others as well as a spark for further ideas on how we may work together to improve health care quality in the region.”*

## Improving Patient Experience

### How UW Neighborhood Clinics improved their patients’ experience of care

#### Background

The UW Neighborhood Clinics offer primary care at nine locations throughout the greater Seattle area, with two clinic locations also offering urgent care services. The UW Neighborhood Clinics are part of the University of Washington Medicine healthcare system, which also includes four hospitals (UW Medical Center, Harborview, NW Hospital, and Valley Medical Center), a physician practice plan, UW Physicians, a five-state medical student and resident training program built around the UW School of Medicine, and an emergency transport program, Airlift Northwest.<sup>1</sup>

In 2011 and 2013, the Washington Health Alliance administered the Clinician-Group Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CG-CAHPS) patient experience survey to people in the Puget Sound area. The results of the survey, available during the first quarters of 2012 and 2014, are included in the “Your Voice Matters” report, with the goal to produce publicly available comparable patient experience results for medical groups and clinics.<sup>2</sup>

#### Problem

The UW Neighborhood Clinics have always been committed to providing the best personalized patient-centered care, so when their patient experience results came out “average” in the 2012 Your

Voice Matters report, they knew they could improve.

#### Solution

To improve the quality of their patients’ experience, UW Neighborhood Clinics began by looking at national models and developing tactics based on those best practices. Working with the Studer Group, UW Neighborhood Clinics implemented the use of the AIDET tool as a key tactic to drive improvement.

**AIDET (Acknowledge, Introduce, Duration, Explanation, and Thank you)** focuses on five communication behaviors for staff and physicians to use when communicating with patients and their family to “anticipate, meet, and exceed the expectations of the customer.”<sup>4</sup>

**Experience vs. Satisfaction**  
*Patient experience is not the same thing as another commonly used survey that measures patient satisfaction. Patient experience surveys ask patients whether or not, or how often, certain events actually occurred during their interaction with their doctor and health care team. Satisfaction surveys, in contrast, focus on the patient’s expectations and feelings of the interaction, which can be subjective.*

## Solutions, Cont'd

In developing a comprehensive strategy, UW Neighborhood Clinics developed training and support programs for all levels of the care team, and implemented a new physician compensation program that included provider communication as one of its elements.

**Staff strategies:** *The first expression a patient may see when entering the clinic should not be off-putting. Therefore, improving the patient's experience is something that involves everyone, from providers to front office receptionists.*

- **Initial training and interactive sessions** were conducted for all staff in how to consistently use the AIDET communication method. The training not only focused on the “how” of using the AIDET tool, but also the “why” – helping patients understand the care process and ensure they understand instructions is critical to providing best possible care.
- **Staff observations and patient rounding.** On a regular basis, clinic managers ask patients about multiple aspects of their experiences in the clinic, including how they were greeted, whether they received instructions at each step in their visit, and if there is anything the clinic could be doing to better meet their needs; Managers also routinely observe how staff are communicating with patients.
- **Immediate feedback.** Once a clinic manager learns something from staff observations or patient rounding, immediate feedback—positive and negative—is provided. Originally they looked into a formal tracking system but felt that timely, more conversational-type of feedback was more effective.
- **Friendly competition and celebrating success.** Clinic scores, in relation to other UW Neighborhood Clinics, are posted in the clinic and discussed in staff meetings. “Fun bucks” are given monthly to the highest performing clinic for a free lunch for all of the clinic staff, and an executive team leader visits the clinic to recognize and congratulate the clinic staff.

**UW Neighborhood Clinic motto:**  
  
**Patients First.**  
**Every Patient, Every Time.**

- **Training.** Training for improved provider-patient interactions is provided, using the AIDET tool. It's made clear that the focus is on ensuring *effective* provider-patient communication to develop trust and improve outcomes.
- **Transparency.** Over four years ago, UW Neighborhood Clinics began quarterly reporting providers scores on the visit-based version of the CG-CAHPS survey, administered across UW Medicine on an ongoing basis. They began with blinded results (e.g. provider #20 out of 75) as a source for objective feedback. Then, after getting approval from providers, they un-blinded the results, posting everyone's scores on their internal intranet site and discussed the results openly at quarterly staff meetings. Scores for a rolling six-month period are now posted *monthly* for all providers and are accessible to all staff across the system.
- **Coaching.** Individualized coaching is offered and, to date, approximately 75% of providers have voluntarily taken

advantage of this opportunity. A designated clinical champion begins by looking into the provider's CG-CAHPS results, including a review of patient comments from the surveys, shadows the provider during a patient visit, and then follows up with individualized feedback over lunch.

Feedback includes specific suggestions based on patient survey results and comments, as well as the observations from shadowing. Because it's been received so favorably, coaching is now part of the new provider orientation process.

- **Incentives.** Linking provider scores to compensation helps highlight the importance of patient experience to the organization and ultimately serves to improve patient care and outcomes.
- **Raising the bar.** It is important to raise the expectations and goals for continuous improvement at all levels: providers, individual clinics, and the organization. It is also helpful to break-down the composite scores and address the individual questions behind each of the four categories. For example, a tactic to improve “getting timely care” has been placing timers outside of the exam room so the provider and office staff know exactly how long the patient has been waiting, and to make sure staff are keeping the patient informed of when they will be seeing their provider.

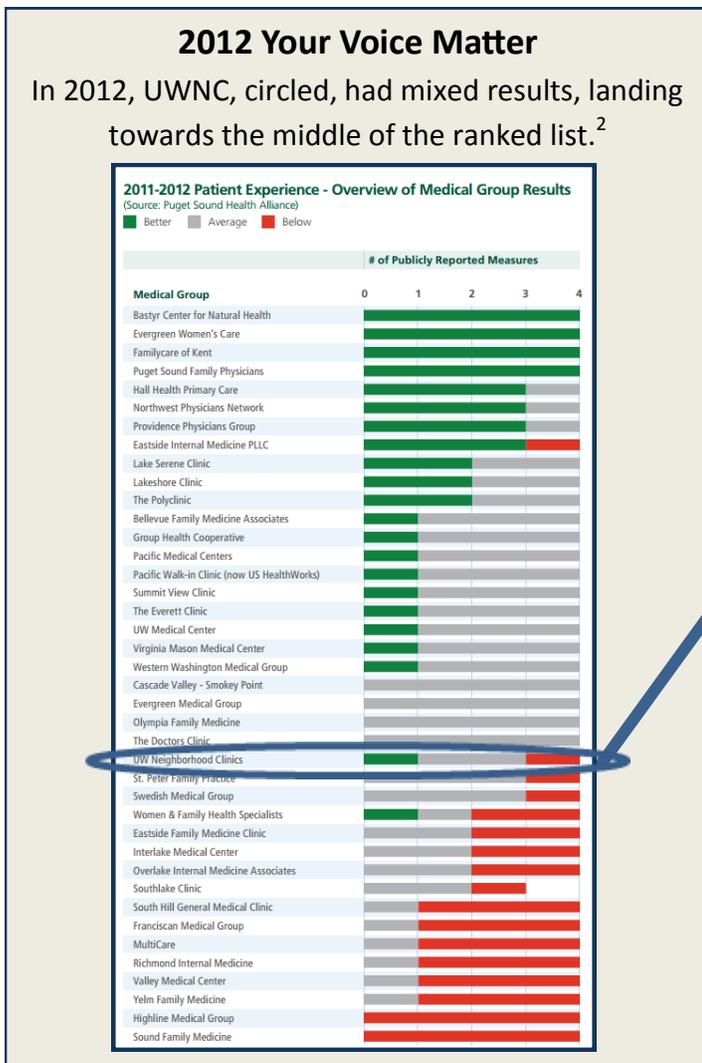
**Provider strategies:** *A patient's experience is heavily influenced by how well their provider knows important information about their medical history and how well their provider listens to what they have to say.*

## Results

UW Neighborhood Clinic’s (UWNC) 2012 and 2014 results for the four measure categories in the Washington Health Alliance’s patient experience survey are seen below:

CG-CAHPS categories reported in the Alliance’s <i>Your Voice Matters</i>	2012 UWNC results	2014 UWNC results
<b>Getting timely appointments, care, and information</b> (composite score, five survey questions)	average	better than regional average
<b>How well providers communicate with patients</b> (composite score, six survey questions)	better than regional average	better than regional average
<b>Helpful, courteous, and respectful office staff</b> (composite score, two survey questions)	below regional average	better than regional average
<b>Patient’s overall rating of the provider</b>	average	better than regional average

Furthermore, UWNC was one of only five medical groups who received above-regional-average scores on all four categories in 2014. *Congratulations as well to the other four “All Star” medical groups in 2014: Bastyr Center for Natural Health, EvergreenHealth Women’s Care, Familycare of Kent, and the Polyclinic!*



See the full results of the 2012 and 2014 Own Your Voice report at:  
<http://wahealthalliance.org/alliance-reports-websites/your-voice-matters/>

**Want to recommend a  
program for an upcoming  
Spotlight?**

**Contact us!**

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### **About the Alliance**

*The [Washington Health Alliance](#), an Aligning Forces for Quality Community, is a non-profit made up of those who provide, pay for and use health care, working to improve quality of care at a price more people can afford. More than 165 organizations have joined the Alliance, including The Boeing Company, Starbucks, Puget Sound Energy, WA State Health Care Authority, King County and many other employers, physician groups, hospitals, consumer organizations, unions, health plans, pharmaceutical companies, associations and others.*

*A cornerstone of the Alliance work is the [Community Checkup](#), a regional report to the public comparing the performance of clinics and hospitals for basic measures of quality care in Washington State.*

### **Challenges**

“We’re not done yet!” The UW Neighborhood Clinic still sees room for improvement and keeping the momentum takes continued commitment from everyone.

### **Keys to Success**

1. Develop comprehensive strategies:
  - Start with strong engagement from leadership and clinic leaders
  - Learn from best practices
  - Develop a comprehensive strategy to address barriers at all levels
  - Reward success
2. Foster effective care teams who are committed to working well with each other to collaboratively improve care.

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### **References and Resources**

**1. UW Neighborhood Clinic:**

[www.uwmedicine.org/neighborhood-clinics](http://www.uwmedicine.org/neighborhood-clinics)

**2. YOUR VOICE MATTERS, 2012 and 2014 reports:**

<http://wahealthalliance.org/alliance-reports-websites/your-voice-matters/>

**3. STUDER GROUP:**

[www.studergroup.com](http://www.studergroup.com)