Increasing efficiency across the continuum of care: Hepatitis C is the “new frontier” for delivering cost-effective, coordinated and consistent care practices through the latest technology.

With the advent of new technologies including EMR and health information exchange, the healthcare industry’s traditional silos of patient data are beginning to break down. By promoting the sharing of important data about a patient’s treatment and medical history, these systems have the potential to improve efficiency by reducing duplication of services, medical errors and waste. However, there is still much work to be done in terms of determining how technology can also support consistent, high quality care delivery, which is by nature much more efficient.

Nowhere is this opportunity to improve efficiency and quality more evident than in the treatment of at-risk, high-cost populations. Payers, ACOs and health systems are beginning to promote clinical protocols that drive greater consistency within care delivery to better manage these patients. However, much of their focus has been on a handful of chronic conditions including diabetes, asthma and COPD. Hepatitis C has not been a primary focus of most of these efforts, despite the fact that studies show that HCV was the principal diagnosis for 64,867 hospitalizations in 2010-11, resulting in total costs of $3.5 billion nationwide.

There are many practical reasons for this approach. The first is that these other populations tend to be larger, meaning that the return on investment for their efforts could be greater. This is essential since current efforts are often expensive and not very scalable, given that they depend heavily on human interactions with very little support from technology. In addition, Hepatitis C is a complex disease to treat and patients with this condition are frequently hard-to-manage because of comorbidities, lifestyle issues and risk factors.

However, new emerging opportunities can put Hepatitis C in the “low hanging fruit” category where investing in better management pays off in big returns. One of the most significant innovations is the use of clinical pathways to drive more standardized care and efficiency. Clinical pathways have traditionally been used to help physicians manage complex conditions such as cancer with remarkable success. In fact, researchers say that using clinical pathways can improve clinical outcomes and quality by reducing avoidable variation in the clinical process. They have also shown potential in increasing patient satisfaction.
The impact is even greater when clinical pathways merge with new technology. New web-based software can now be built around these pathways, helping providers improve the efficiency in care practices and minimize waste, all while promoting greater consistency. These platforms also serve as a point of connection between payers, specialty pharmacies, patients and physicians, promoting an opportunity for more coordinated and informed decision making. As a result, greater efficiency can be achieved across the entire continuum of care—whether a patient is receiving outreach from a care manager, being managed by their PCP or seeing a behavioral health specialist for addiction and mental health issues.

These new technologies also enable information sharing that is specifically targeted at the HCV population, driving data exchange and reporting specifically to this condition and its distinct challenges. For example, a specialty pharmacy can share medication adherence data with physicians and payers, providing valuable insight about whether a patient is taking their medication on time and as directed. This will drive timely and efficient outreach efforts to address adherence issues.

As the entire healthcare industry makes strides toward improving quality and efficiency across the continuum of care, it makes sense that payers and providers will focus much of their efforts on conditions that have the biggest potential return of investment. However, Hepatitis C represents an untapped opportunity, especially as new technology makes it much more cost-effective to deliver efficient, outcomes-driven care practices across this population.

To learn more about how the Primrose HCV Patient Management Solution can empower providers to optimize treatment and improve outcomes for Hepatitis C patients, please contact Karlynn Billings, Vice President of Sales, today at 407-992-6283.