

Lakeland Hospitalist Program Continues Rapid Growth

Hospitalist programs have grown rapidly in the United States over the last 10 years, and Lakeland HealthCare is no exception. The first area hospital to initiate a hospitalist service with four physicians in 2003, Lakeland's hospitalist program now has quadrupled in size. Lakeland's fifteen hospitalists log over 22,000 patient encounters per year at the St. Joseph and Niles campus locations, seeing patients in the Emergency Department, admitting them as inpatients, following them into the critical care unit if needed, and coordinating post-acute care.

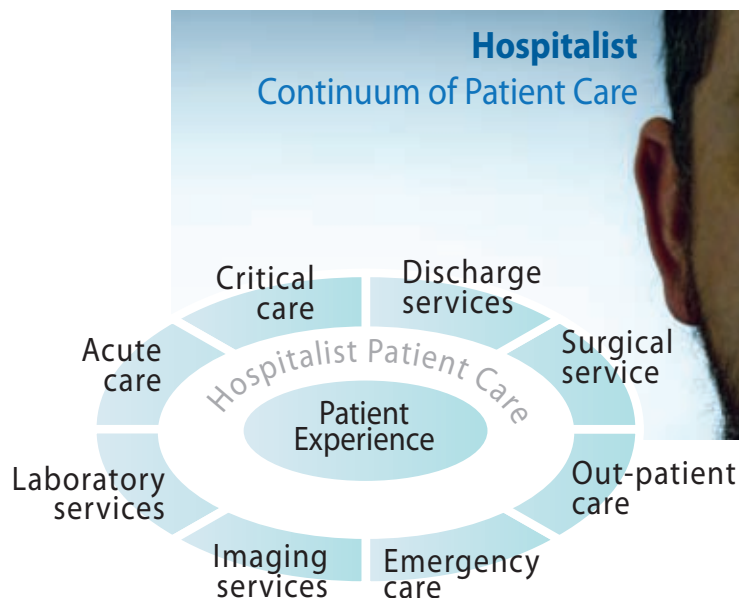
"Patients and their families appreciate the indispensable role hospitalists play in providing the highest-quality patient care," said Dr. Mark Harrison, hospitalist program director. "The hospitalists allow a seamless transition for the patient between their family physician and the hospital."

Hospitalist Care Reduces Length of Inpatient Stay

A recent study in the New England Journal of Medicine shows that hospitalists reduce a patient's length of stay in the hospital by almost half a day.¹ The study looked at 76,926 patients at 45 hospitals between September 2002 and January 2005, treated by hospitalists, general internists, and family physicians. Those patients cared for by hospitalists showed a .4 day shorter stay than those patients treated by general internists and family physicians. This efficiency is a direct reflection of the quality of care provided.

"As a primary care physician, I see patients on an outpatient basis," said **Dr. Daniel Reichert** with University Medical Specialists in Berrien Springs. "It is an extraordinary benefit for my patient to have a physician who specializes in inpatient and critical care available twenty-four hours a day during the hospital stay. The patients don't feel 'abandoned'; to the contrary, they feel very well taken care of by the Lakeland hospitalists."

Because hospitalists devote all of their time to inpatient care, they have extended clinical knowledge of the most common conditions and the issues involved with managing patients with multiple co-morbidities. Hospitalists not only become familiar with the flow of patients through their hospital, but are often well-versed



Dr. Mark Harrison, director of the Lakeland HealthCare hospitalist program



in a wide range of healthcare industry issues, such as payer/insurance rules, state and Federal regulations, public health initiatives and healthcare legislation.

*“The hospitalists have significantly contributed to creating a standardized program for evidence-based medicine. They are experts in following the protocols and best care practices for hospitalized patients,” said **Dr. Harrison**. “For an affliction such as pneumonia, the sheer volume of cases the hospitalist manages enhances treatment effectiveness and standardization.”*

Efficient Communication Leads to Better Care

Before the hospitalist program was implemented, there were many more attending physicians off-site with different offices, different schedules, and different preferences, which created challenges to communication in patient care. Lakeland HealthCare associates, nurses and care management staff find the physician who is constantly on the premises easier to access and for coordination of patient care.

“The hospitalists are here 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If we have a patient who is having difficulty, we

Daniel Snyder, M.D., enjoys the structured schedule of the hospitalist program

can page a hospitalist and know that he or she is on site and will respond within the half hour,” said **Lori Blake, RN**, medical oncology department. “The hospitalists are very easy to work with and are open to suggestions. In turn, they give us helpful suggestions and ways to improve our practice. It’s wonderful to have the hospitalist program available for our patients.”

Primary Care Physicians Lead the Charge

Primary care physicians in Berrien County were the original advocates for a hospitalist program at Lakeland, according to Dr. George Heenan, Family Physicians of St Joseph, Michigan and Lakeland HealthCare Board of Directors member. The increasing demand on outpatient primary care physicians to complete a full day of office visits and make rounds to their patients admitted to the hospital has contributed to the success and popularity of hospitalist programs. Lakeland partners with Southwest Michigan Medical Clinic, the largest physicians group in the community, rather than an outside vendor to manage the hospitalist program.

The positive working relationship between area referring physicians and the hospitalist physicians is supported by satisfaction survey data from June 2007. The recent VHA physician satisfaction report noted that *“Lakeland’s scores are higher than any other hospital within the VHA data base”* in regards to open, honest communication between hospital staff and partner physicians.

The Future of Hospitalists

Hospitalist medicine is the fastest-growing medical specialization in the U.S., with the rank of hospitalists projected to grow from 20,000 to 30,000 by the end of the decade.²

"The hospitalist movement is attracting a new kind of doctor, which is the dedicated inpatient internist," said **Dr. Daniel Snyder**, hospitalist, "The hospitalist option provides a whole new career niche for physicians who would like a more structured life, which describes the needs of many new graduates. It is a much-needed career option for the next generation of physicians."

To arrange for hospitalist services for your hospitalized patients, contact **Mark Harrison, MD**, at **269-542-1198**.

¹ New England Journal of Medicine, December 20, 2007

² Society of Hospital Medicine, 2007

Lakeland HealthCare hospitalists offer numerous benefits to primary and specialty care physicians, including:

- More time available available for office patients
- Improved outpatient office productivity
- Reduced travel time
- Acting as a referral source for new patients
- Performing pre-procedural risk assessments, avoiding surgical delays
- Allowing specialists to focus on procedural work by addressing routine medical issues
- Coordinating care management
- Acting as a liaison between all members of the physician care team to ensure optimal patient care
- Providing more immediate response to inpatient emergencies