CASE STUDY

Improving Opioid Practices Through Risk Assessments

Problem

California Healthcare Insurance Company, Inc., a Risk Retention Group (CHI)—along with its risk management subsidiary Optima Healthcare Insurance Services—prioritized the safe and responsible use of opioids as an annual corporate program goal. Opioid safety was a natural choice for a program goal. “It’s all over the news media; it’s on every listserv that I participate in,” says Regina Vukson, RN, BSBA, CPHQ, CPHRM, senior risk consultant for Optima.

The issue of opioid safety affected all types of hospitals, from small critical access hospitals to large medical centers, whether urban facilities or rural, and CHI owner organizations had not been spared the impact. Many of their owner organizations felt they were already doing a good job with regard to opioid safety, but they suspected that an assessment might help them see if opportunities existed to improve patient safety and reduce risk.

CHI and Optima had already done a lot of work through other initiatives to improve the appropriateness of medication prescribing and turned to ECRI to assess their risks for opioid safety.

Solution

ECRI immediately set out to gather information from CHI’s owner organizations using its proprietary Proactive Risk Assessment for Opioids tool. The electronic survey tool enabled them to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement related to opioid practices.

Leaders said that the risk assessment was well worth the expense and effort because it provided direction for positive change. “The value and investment is really strong,” Vukson said. “The sky is the limit for making improvements and reducing patient harm” when senior leaders are committed to change and supply the necessary resources, said Vukson.

Result

Using ECRI's Proactive Risk Assessment, CHI's owner organizations learned that they had the most opportunity for improvement in four areas: dispensing, quality improvement processes, prescribing, and patient monitoring. “Our results demonstrated there are a lot of systems processes that could use improvement,” says Vukson. “You can have the best policies and procedures in the world, but how safe is your environment, and do clinical decision support tools really enhance safety?”

CHI and Optima planned to continue to track progress with the recommendations from the assessment after the project concluded. CHI and Optima said they would assess these metrics on a semiannual basis for the next several years. “The work doesn’t just end because the end date has occurred as far as the program is concerned,” Vukson explains. “Our goal is to continually make a positive difference in healthcare.”

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