

Patient and Family Voices



Performance Challenge

A lack of patient input negatively impacts patient and family engagement, as well as access and quality of care. Integrating the per-

Practice Solution

Located in the rural community of Ajo, Arizona, about 43 miles north of the Mexican border, Desert Senita is a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) and part of the Arizona Alliance for Community Health Centers. DSCHC has 12 providers including physicians, nurse practitioners, behavioral health counselors, pharmacists, and a registered dietitian. It provides a variety of services to more than 75% of the population of Ajo—or over 2,500 residents. Over one third of the practice's patients live below the federal poverty line.

Challenges to Meet: DSCHC's population had a high incidence of overweight and obese patients, as reported by Uniform Data System (UDS). In addition, the highest number of visits by adults to the practice were for hypertension and anxiety disorders. Patients were often unable to attend appointments because of work hours, limited transportation, or inadequate knowledge of health needs. Due to high rates of poverty, stress, domestic violence, and substance abuse, DSCHC focused on children and adolescents to improve immunization rates and dental exams, as well as health outcomes and youth safety.

Engagement in Care: In a small community like Desert Senita, personal stories make an impression and inspire creative solutions to addressing challenges. DSCHC implemented "Ask Me Three," a program that encourages patients and families to ask three specific questions during visits in order to gain a better understanding of patients' needs, interests, and values, and to help patients become more active in their own care. In addition, the practice offered outreach customer service calls, in English and Spanish, and annual patient satisfaction surveys that also incorporate the "Ask Me Three" model. The practice fully integrated the model into their quality improvement strategies, with care access and healthy lifestyles as key focal points.

Systematically Gathering Patient Input: Use of "Ask Me Three" led to more involved conversations with patients and families, providing critical information for internal quality improvement discussions. Informal conversations were conducted by staff in the waiting room and at community activities, highlighting what worked and what could be improved. The input was shared among patient community representation to key decision-makers, such as the Board of Directors—51% of whom are patients at the practice.

Change Steps

