

"MORTAR & PENCIL" CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY WISCONSIN SCHOOL OF PHARMACY STUDENT WRITING CLUB:

Business Member Spotlight: Ascension Wisconsin

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Ascension is a faith-based healthcare organization dedicated to transformation through innovation across the continuum of care. As one of the leading non-profit and Catholic health systems in the United States, Ascension is committed to delivering compassionate, personalized care to all - with special attention to persons living in poverty and those most vulnerable. Its mission is dedicated to spiritually-centered, holistic care that sustains and improves the health of individuals and communities.¹

Nationally, the system has 2,600 sites of care - including 150 hospitals and more than 50 senior living facilities - in 20 states and the District of Columbia, while providing a variety of services including clinical and network services, venture capital investing, investment management, biomedical engineering, facilities management, risk management, and contracting through Ascension's own group purchasing organization.

In Wisconsin, pharmacy departments vary from 24-hour facilities to critical access sites staffed certain days and times of the week. Pharmacists work at the top of their license in a decentralized model on various units, including: intensive care, neonatal intensive care, cardiology, oncology, orthopedics, neurology, psychiatry and medical/surgical. Pharmacists participate in multidisciplinary rounds and readmission reduction efforts, provide clinical dosing and monitoring services and precept introductory and advanced practice students and pharmacy residents. They also work closely with qualified pharmacy technicians to provide quality patient care.

In 2016, Ascension announced that

four Wisconsin health systems, including 24 hospitals and more than 100 clinics, would be coming together as Ascension Wisconsin. Figure 1 below shows each of these locations. One of the most important goals was to make sure that every location shared a common purpose and could deliver on the mission of the organization as these changes were taking place.

In the beginning months, leaders addressed the challenges presented by diverse geography, different electronic health records (EHRs) and varying policies and procedures. Despite these challenges, the pharmacy department played an important role in leading this transformation. Over the last three years, it has come together and delivered on clinical and financial goals using associates' creativity. Early on, it was understood that success would require a common pharmacy department platform to standardize its formulary, clinical services and policies. Today, one statewide pharmacy and therapeutics committee has been launched, supported by a pharmacy leadership council and statewide clinical council.

How Did They Get There?

To start the process of joining these legacy systems as Ascension Wisconsin, the pharmacy leadership team was redesigned. The new team includes a vice president, four regional directors, a pharmacy manager or supervisor overseeing one or more sites and a pharmacy lead at each site. In addition, two statewide pharmacy managers were introduced: a manager of clinical initiatives and drug utilization and a manager of ambulatory care. To align the practices in Wisconsin with Ascension's national initiatives and formulary, the position of clinical initiatives/drug utilization was created to serve as the

conduit with the national Pharmacy and Therapeutics (P&T) Committee. Likewise, in 2016, there were five different P&T committees and a formulary committee for the EPIC EHR sites. The team recognized that to be successful, they needed to establish a single statewide P&T committee.

To begin forming one statewide P&T committee, the local committees designed a best-practices charter to ensure fair representation from each hospital. The goal was for the P&T committee to have eight to 10 core members. This required regional membership with each member representing multiple sites. Senior leadership galvanized support from all 24 hospitals for this unified committee structure. Ultimately, the charter was passed by each local medical staff and the committee is operational today.

To run this single P&T committee efficiently and to support a broad range of services and specialties/service lines, the charter proposed establishing oncology, antimicrobial stewardship (ASP), ambulatory care and medication safety subcommittees. To date, the ASP and operations teams have launched, and the oncology subcommittee will commence shortly. Charters are under review for the medication safety and ambulatory care subcommittees. Each of the subcommittee's recommendations are proposed to the main committee as consent agenda items for approval and a topic can be pulled for further discussion, as needed.

To support the committee operating efficiently, the team is leveraging the seven residency programs across the state. This innovative approach involves assigning each resident a two-month rotation to recommend P&T agenda items. Residents are paired with a local clinical expert based

on the topic. Some of the topics also support the work of Ascension's national formulary.

Raising the Bar

While Ascension Wisconsin is now structured to approve statewide initiatives and policies, success depends on the ability to operationalize these changes, which requires carefully implementing and prioritizing the work. A few strategies include: a standardized checklist for post P&T implementation, regional accountability trackers for pharmacy leadership and staying connected to clinical informatics leaders. A benefit of this collaboration has been the creation of statewide policies to support the standardized pharmacist programs, including intravenous/oral conversion, therapeutic interchanges and specific medication monitoring and dosing services, to name a few. Finally, because Ascension Wisconsin is a part of a national health system, it can leverage the national education team to develop education materials, competencies and toolkits to support the implementation of larger initiatives.

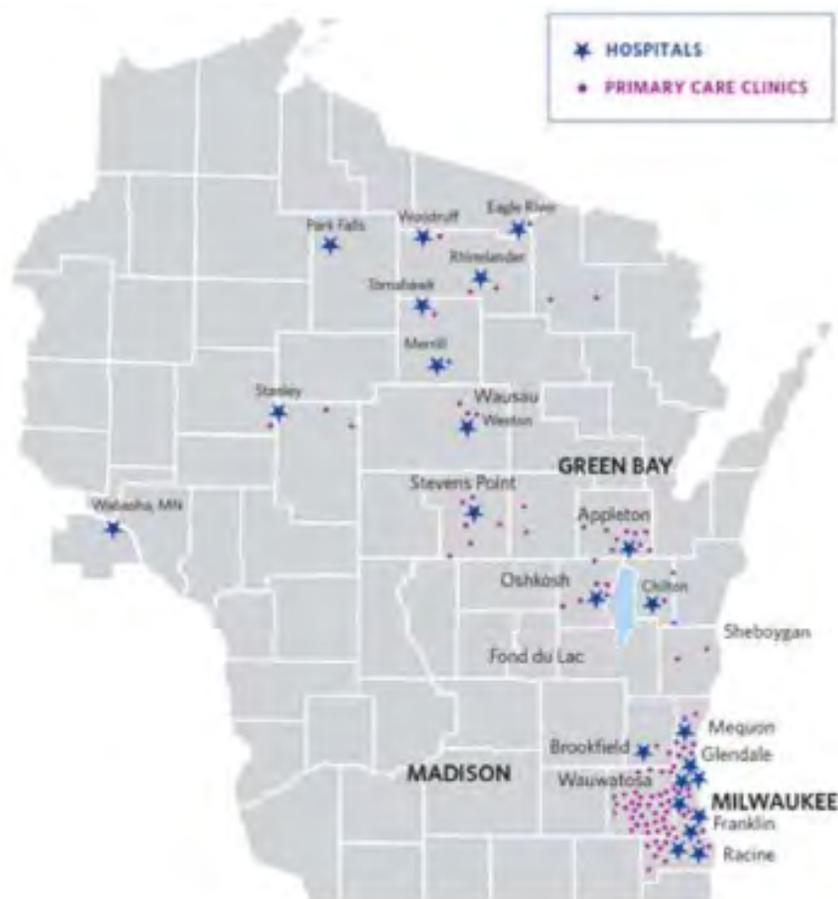
Bumps in the Road

As in every journey, there are hurdles to overcome and lessons to be learned. Having locations across the state from as far south as Racine to as far north as Eagle River has provided Ascension Wisconsin with the opportunity to utilize technology resources to conduct virtual meetings. Interactive polling, chat tools and using webcams to 'see' each other fosters connection virtually across a diverse geography. Ascension Wisconsin also has worked to make the P&T decision-making process more efficient to avoid delays in implementing changes. To streamline this process, the committee implemented virtual approval of P&T minutes, which occurs prior to the next meeting and allows implementation to begin sooner. To ensure consistent communication across the market, a standardized newsletter is disseminated to all providers with admitting privileges to the hospitals.

Moving Forward

Ascension Wisconsin is continuously

FIGURE 1. Map of Ascension Wisconsin Hospital and Clinic Locations



innovating to enhance its clinical and operational services to carry out its mission to deliver compassionate, personalized care to all. Future goals include the creation of a standard digital platform for P&T decisions and other supporting materials, for all Ascension Wisconsin clinicians to use. The goal is to provide consistent practices, while taking into consideration local needs. The P&T committee and support teams look forward to further standardization work and approving policies to advance the pharmacy services provided statewide.

References

1. Ascension. Mission, vision and values. <https://ascension.org/Our-Mission/Mission-Vision-Values>. Accessed October 24, 2019.

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