

# Managing Patient Throughput Across Multiple Care Settings in a Health System



Palomar Health is California's largest public health care district by area, and the most comprehensive healthcare delivery system in northern San Diego County. Since the 1970s, Vituity has successfully staffed and managed the emergency departments (EDs) at both Palomar Medical Center and nearby Pomerado Hospital.

Over that time, Vituity's physician leaders earned a positive reputation throughout the health system. Throughput and performance metrics were good at both sites, even in the face of rising volume; and the providers were instrumental in coordinating the move of patients into a new state-of-the-art facility in 2012. Recognizing the resource they had in Vituity, administrators at Palomar Health selected the organization to manage its two inpatient departments, as well as the new standby ED and health clinic at the downtown campus.

Even before the contract start date, Vituity providers and consultants were talking to the hospitalists and identifying opportunities for the newly integrated team to tackle.

The medical directors of the newly unified emergency and hospitalist teams saw a need for increased communication. To bolster communication, the medical directors implemented a joint clinical meeting, inviting providers, nurses, and staff to attend. The meeting is used to share data across departments and identify processes that need improvement and is a best practice across Vituity.

In this joint meeting, the teams identified goals they wanted to accomplish in one year, including reducing the average length of stay (LOS), decreasing turnaround time to admission (TAT-A) and discharge (TAT-D), and improving patient satisfaction. The providers have continued to meet on a regular basis. This alignment allows them to work more efficiently and effectively. They frequently come together to review metrics and come up with strategies to improve the patient experience. They established a centralized-bed-placement system that acted as the single entry point for all admissions and transfers, allowing for better care coordination across clinical settings.

Within a year, the results of their collaboration produced exciting improvements, including:

- Average TAT-A reduced by 50 minutes across all practices
- LOS dropped by 6 percent
- TAT-D decreased by 7 percent
- Patient satisfaction scores increased dramatically

By laying the groundwork and working together, the emergency physicians and hospitalists at Palomar Health have been able to have a positive impact on patient care. Administrators took notice as well, asking Vituity to take over its critical care services starting in 2015.