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Case Study: FastBack™ Subacute

Organized Approach To Surgical Referrals Increases Surgeon Efficiency and Effectiveness

Problem: Dr. Smith* is a spine surgeon in New England known as the “go-to” careful and conservative professional for people with back pain in his community. But his office was swamped with non-surgical cases, and he was losing patients to the aggressive practitioners across town.

Solution: Haig et al. designed a whole-system referral process that educated primary care physicians, coordinated physiatry consultations and brought well-organized, good surgical cases to Dr. Smith. Our pre-habilitation and post-op coordination program meant that Dr. Smith could hand off completed cases and focus on those who needed him next.

Approach: The healthcare system surrounded Dr. Smith with trusted, accountable help so he no longer had to see every possible case to winnow out the few that needed surgery. When a patient met the surgical criteria, he or she was referred to him with an organized, appropriate workup. Additionally, the unavoidable chronic failed surgery cases were no longer his primary responsibility.

Outcome: Dr. Smith’s clinic visit-to-operation ratio changed radically, and his office was filled with people he could cure.

Lessons Learned: Borne out of experience leading the University of Michigan Spine Program, FastBack Subacute includes processes and protocols to ensure that a health system supports its valued expert while improving throughput for primary care physicians. Every situation is different, so we customize the approach to the political and financial environment of each healthcare system.

**Names have been changed to protect privacy.*