

# A Culture of Quality Improvement Promotes Guideline-Based Asthma Care

**W**hite River Family Practice (WRFP) is an independent, primary care practice located in Vermont's Upper Valley. The practice includes six family practitioners, three nurse practitioners, and several administrative and clinical support staff. Aware of the role quality improvement (QI) plays in ensuring effective, efficient, and safe health care services that best meet patient needs, WRFP has institutionalized a culture of quality improvement within the practice.

Identifying a need to make improvements in the practice's adherence to guideline-based asthma care, Dr. Uiterwyk, a family practice physician, Toni Apgar, RN and care coordinator, and Lisa Baker, a medical assistant at WRFP participated in the Vermont Asthma Learning Collaborative (VALC). Dr. Uiterwyk championed the VALC within his practice, sharing information and ideas from the learning collaborative with other WRFP providers and staff during their practice QI meetings. This leadership and information facilitated discussion and spurred system changes within the practice's administrative workflow and clinical processes to support the delivery of guideline-based asthma care at WRFP.

The VALC helped the practice: 1) assess their current processes and systems for providing guideline-based asthma care, 2) identify where they needed to make improvements, and 3) motivate them to develop strategies for systems changes. As a result, several changes were implemented:

- Workflow was modified to systematize the assessment of asthma severity and control. Now, as part of pre-visit prep work, the medical assistant reviews charts to determine whether asthma patients will need an assessment of asthma severity or control. Asthma control tests are administered by the medical assistant prior to the patient seeing the provider.
- A system was put in place for flagging providers to update patients' asthma action plans and disseminate to schools and child care providers as indicated.
- The practice enhanced their asthma education resource packet with additional materials and systematized its use by providing all asthma patients a packet at check-in.

These systems changes fostered adherence to guideline-based asthma care as demonstrated by improvements in the practice's VALC performance measures. WRFP's culture of QI supports their continued efforts in monitoring data to ensure effective systems changes and high-quality asthma care.

**"The collaborative nature was an external motivator, as was the sharing of data. The fact that there was a discrete set of goals with a very clear endpoint and time line was helpful for busy practitioners to accomplish."**

—Dr. Sean Uiterwyk,  
White River Family Practice

White River Family Practice:  
VALC Asthma Guideline Process Improvement Measures

