BEYOND THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

How Mercy Fort Smith Reduced Unnecessary Lab Test Orders by 40%

Mercy Fort Smith tested an analyticsMD decision recipe to reduce lab test utilization after seeing the system’s success in the Emergency Department. Orders for unnecessary labs dropped 30% in 3 months.

Challenge

As Mercy embarked on a shift from a fee-for-service model to a value-based care model, they looked at ways to avoid unnecessary lab tests, which are costly for the patient, increase LOS, and slow down other operations. Physicians ordered certain tests out of habit, even when they weren’t absolutely necessary, and they needed a nudge to change this behavior.

Solution

The physicians used an Qventus recipe to identify tests that had significant variations in their usage between physicians for patients with similar complaints. Medical leadership reviewed these tests and agreed on 6 lab procedures that physicians ordered at a higher rate than necessary, and deployed an analyticsMD decision recipe. analyticsMD sent a weekly recap email that showed how often physicians ordered those 6 tests and how they ranked against their peers.

Results

40% decrease in test orders for six unnecessary tests in just four months as well as $750K in estimated lab test savings.

Doctors became more aware of their test ordering behaviors, and adjusted them. The ability to see data for themselves every week increased awareness and ownership, and behaviors changed naturally, without limits, penalties, or incentives.

The 6 target labs dropped 40% in utilization with 18 months of historical data, accompanied by an overall decrease in all test orders, which would have an estimated annualized cost impact of $15 million across the Mercy network. This resulted in smaller bills for patients, shorter LOS, and a more efficient lab, preparing Mercy to be a successful player in the new world of value-based care.