

## **Conservative Management Clinic**

### **Winona Health – Winona, MN**

#### **Overview**

Winona Health is a not-for-profit health care system that includes a 99-bed hospital, primary care clinics, more than 1,100 employees, more than 90 physicians and associate providers, a 125-bed nursing home, a 60-apartment assisted living community and a 20-apartment assisted living community for memory care.

In 2015, 216 Minnesotans died as a result of opioid overdoses, and many more experienced addictions to narcotic pain medications. Addiction affects neighbors, families and friends; it touches every Minnesota community. Preventing and treating opioid addiction is a shared community responsibility.

“Our community was facing the same problem as others: the accelerating prescription rate for narcotics,” said Winona Health internal medicine physician Daniel Parker, M.D. “Senior leadership discussions and conversations held among physician leaders and their administrative partners led to changes designed to address this issue.”

To provide stronger monitoring of opioid prescriptions, Winona Health required patients receiving opioid prescriptions to see a doctor or registered nurse face-to-face every three months. The team hoped this would stem the flow of excess opioids into the community.

But that was only part of the problem. Opioids are not always the most effective way to treat pain and can carry a higher risk of addiction than other alternatives. The Conservative Management Clinic (CMC) was designed as a pain management clinic dedicated not only to curbing the use of opioids, but also to helping patients find the safest, most effective treatment options to lessen their pain.

In creating the CMC, the team focused on developing standard work, with the expectation that the same disciplined approach to prescribing narcotics would be taken back to each primary care area to be used with all patients, not just those seen in the CMC.

Now, if a medical professional at Winona Health determines that opioids are the best course of treatment, they use prescribing guidelines to give the patient the lowest effective dose that treats pain and carries the lowest risk for addiction. The clinic also makes patients aware of the addictive risks associated with opioids, providing information in tandem with alternative pain management options including cognitive, physical and behavioral therapy as well as other alternatives, such as mindfulness.

All hospital primary care providers rotate through the CMC for professional education on painkiller potency and alternative pain management options.

“We believe in teamwork throughout our system, and this was an opportunity to help our newer providers by distributing the hard work of tapering and, when possible, discontinuing opiates for some patients who had been on them for a long time,” explained Parker.

**Impact**

The CMC was created and continues to evolve through the work of a team that includes physicians, nurses, continuous system improvement staff, administrative personnel, social workers, pharmacists and mental health professionals.

The results of the CMC team's efforts are impressive. Since the launch of the CMC, Winona Health has experienced a 25 percent drop in the number of opioid prescriptions issued and a 30 percent drop in the average dosage patients receive.

"We often see patients who don't understand the need to change these medications," said Parker. "It is necessary for us to offer understanding and compassion as we seek more effective and appropriate ways to treat their pain."

**Lessons Learned**

Winona Health leadership agreed that the work being done in the CMC should become standard practice for all Winona Health providers. Currently, providers from the emergency department, urgent care clinic and surgical services are rotating through the CMC.

**Future Goals**

The CMC recently expanded its scope to include managing stimulants and benzodiazepines.

**Contact:** Betsy Midthun  
Vice President, Community Engagement  
**Telephone:** 507-457-4116  
**Email:** bmidthun@winonahealth.org

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