

Profiles in Success - August 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Communities

Each quarter, Health Dimensions Group profiles a client to offer an insider's view of one organization's strategies and decision-making on timely topics of key importance in health care today.

Value-Based Education and Strategy Development to Support Campus Expansion

Immanuel Lutheran Communities has been serving seniors in the Kalispell, Montana, region for almost 60 years through residential living, assisted living, rehabilitation, and skilled nursing. As northwest Montana's only life plan community, Immanuel Lutheran Communities provides an integrated, resident-centered continuum of care all in one place.

In recent years, Immanuel Lutheran Communities has begun a master planning process to update and further expand its campus. By 2018, their independent living options will have expanded to include The Villas—36 apartment homes with contract options to ensure priority access to the continuum of care. With such significant growth and investment, Immanuel Lutheran Communities leadership sought out Health Dimensions Group (HDG) to recommend a set of proactive value-based strategies to inform the programming and partnerships that would support this expansion while considering national trends.

We recently spoke to Jason Cronk, CEO at Immanuel Lutheran Communities, about the challenges his team faced at the start of expansion and how HDG helped guide implementation.



Health Dimensions Group (HDG): What led you to seek out Health Dimensions Group for this project?

Jason Cronk (JC): We embarked on this process at Immanuel Lutheran Communities (Immanuel) to build on and update our campus to reach our full potential. Part of that process involved updating our nursing home. Before we did that, however, we wanted to find data in our local marketplace that would help shape our programming for the expansion. This is what led us to seek out HDG.

HDG: What were you hoping to achieve from this partnership with HDG?

JC: It wasn't clear to me initially what our value proposition would be to the area hospitals to show them that we could meet their needs in this marketplace. As we underwent extensive growth and investment in the future needs of residents and the community, we knew we needed to better position ourselves not only for today, but also for the future in our local market. HDG immediately came to mind as a partner for this project; I was familiar with HDG's work, but never had the opportunity to work with them. My hope was that HDG could help Immanuel develop a program to strengthen our value proposition to the hospitals during this process of updating our nursing home.

HDG: How are some of these challenges you are facing unique to Immanuel as a rural provider?

JC: There are two macro challenges we faced, the first of which was the labor force. We are constantly working on attracting future employees and staying competitive, but trying to attract and retain a workforce that can provide the services we must offer has proven difficult. The other, and probably biggest, challenge we faced was developing a relationship with the hospital in this market. The two hospitals in the area merged over the last six months, so there is now a single entity in the market that we have an opportunity to grow a relationship with and to provide post-acute services solutions for. Making sure Immanuel became a part of their future health care referral system, from providing solutions for post-acute services to leveraging hospital resources to train and educate our staff, was absolutely necessary for Immanuel's continued growth and success in this market.

HDG: How did HDG help you to overcome these challenges?

JC: The value that HDG provided with the on-site work they did—in particular, the educational session with our board of directors and senior leaders—was invaluable to us. It really helped set the table for our board members to understand what we are trying to accomplish, as well as allowed them to better understand what is happening in health care on a national level and what we can expect in our local market as trends emerge.

HDG: How were you able to engage leadership at Immanuel early on to show them this was an area to invest in?

JC: The educational presentation HDG gave ultimately allowed us to make good decisions for our organization that align Immanuel with where the future of strategic partnerships is headed—with area hospitals and with physician groups and a bundled payment system. The case studies that HDG provided to our leaders were also particularly helpful as they illustrated the benefits of bundled payments and reassured our board that we are focusing on the right priority areas of bundled payments, cost outcomes, quality, and partnerships. And that's really the key—educating our leaders so they are able to make the best possible decisions for our organization.

HDG: What new projects for Immanuel came out of the work with HDG?

JC: We knew right away that we wanted to meet with the local hospital's home care agency to talk about their emergence as a dominant player in our market. The hospital has a huge home health network and a durable medical equipment company, so we'd like to use them as a preferred provider of home care, rather than competing against them. In turn, our goal is to have them use Immanuel as a preferred provider of outpatient therapy for our post-acute care residents that are going home. We also have a hospice plan in process, and are looking at strategies to work with the hospital's palliative care department. We've begun conversations with the hospital on these items and hope to start these initiatives as soon as possible.

HDG: What was it like to work with Health Dimensions Group?

JC: The process of working with HDG was exactly what I had hoped it to be. The scope of their work was very clear and their plan was executed efficiently. In fact, the whole project was completed in less than three months. But more than executing a plan, HDG provided effective on-site support that proved their value. HDG delivered an educational session to our board of directors and senior leaders detailing the state of health care at a national level. This content was invaluable for us. It helped our board understand what we are trying to accomplish and how national trends can predict local market activity—such context provided for informed planning and critical decision making.

About Health Dimensions Group

At Health Dimensions Group, senior care is our focus, and our practice encompasses every sector of pre- and post-acute care. We are national thought leaders in post-acute care delivery, hospital post-acute integration, and managed long-term care. Our operational experience in all aspects of health care services provides a depth and breadth of expertise to all our projects. We offer practical business solutions that draw from our strategic and operational expertise and make recommendations on what is achievable and how to develop them successfully.