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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Small Medical Practice Makes Big Changes Lawrenceville Family Medicine Practice Transformation Means Better Care

(LAWRENCEVILLE, Illinois) As we approach full implementation of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in 2014, Rachel Winters, M.D. has made electronic leaps and taken on other changes in the overall transformation to make her practice a high-functioning home for patients. Recently Rachel Winters Family Medicine, located at 2111 Lexington Ave., Suite 3, launched the next phase in improved communication with patients. The patient portal, powered by Updox, enables patients to keep up with their health care in real time, on their own time.

Winters is on the forefront in the overall practice transformation process that many small practices nationwide are doing to not only adapt to the new era of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and other government requirements, but to also provide more efficient and higher quality care for all patients.

Dr. Winters participated in the Illinois Academy of Family Physicians (IAFP) Practice Improvement Network (PIN) to guide her through small and big changes over the past 24 months to reach her goal of providing a patient centered medical home. The PIN project paired her with a seasoned and experienced practice management coach to help her identify gaps and needs in her practice operations, and then helped her craft and implement solutions.

One way the practice has changed their approach is by advanced planning for every patient visit. That means consistently looking one-to-two weeks ahead at the patient schedule to see who is coming in for a routine visit or follow up and determine what other tests or care they might need at that visit. One of her coaches, Kim Nealt of Practice Management Innovations, LLC in Chicago, defines the difference in this approach, "These activities lead to a more 'patient-centered' focus with an emphasis on health, wellness and outcomes. Our coaching efforts also assist Dr. Winters' in creating a health information technology platform that enables her to maximize the use of her technology such as ePrescribing, a robust electronic health record (EHR) and disease management assistance," she says. "With ongoing coaching, we have been able to position Dr. Winters' practice as a future leader in her rural community."

The consistent use of technology improves the practice workflow and ensures patients' care is timely and efficient. Winters uses her new e-faxing module, which eliminates the paper pileup and ensures that all of a patient's referrals, labs, prescriptions, letters and any other information arrives electronically and is added directly to the patient's electronic health record. It also allows the practice to set up reminders to track down any expected documents that have not arrived.

Dr. Winters credits the coaching assistance from Practice Management Innovators and the monthly online practice improvement webinars from IAFP in guiding her through the process. She also praises her staff for their role in adapting and implementing so many new ideas and policies as the practice prepares for the new era of health care delivery. "I think we are well-prepared. My staff has proven to be very change-friendly through this entire process. We now have weekly or bi-weekly staff meetings to address and plan for needed changes."

The entire staff now participates in "morning huddles" to effectively prepare for every patient on the day's schedule and any patients that may need a same-day appointment for an acute problem. By combining and implementing many facets of the patient-centered medical home with optimal use of emerging medical records and communication technology, Rachel Winters Family Medicine can maximize the benefits for every patient. "It makes us more on top of preventive care and good quality care. If a patient chart is reviewed before they come in, they get better care during the visit. We have taken steps towards providing better care for our patients," says Winters.

Many more people will have new access to health care insurance or Medicaid as federal and state health care reform rolls in the coming months. Rachel Winters Family Medicine has been preparing for these changes by making the small and big changes to ensure patients get the right care at the right time. "I'm ready for anything. I have a busy practice. I am hoping that as we increase efficiency that we will be able to see more patients who will be looking for their medical home. "

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EDITORS NOTE: If you would like to interview Dr. Winters and/or her staff please contact office manager Becky Arnold 618-943-6202.