

## QPP-SURS: Improving Practice Quality Reporting

TMF Health Quality Institute is one of 11 organizations across the country chosen by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to help clinicians in small practices (15 or fewer clinicians) and in medically underserved and rural areas participate in the Quality Payment Program (QPP). TMF QPP-SURS (Small, Underserved and Rural Support) provides free technical assistance to these practices in Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico and Texas. The QPP is a quality improvement payment model for eligible clinicians that rewards efficient, patient-centered care and promotes continuous improvement. The QPP began in 2017, which served as a transition year from legacy payment programs (Physician Quality Reporting System, Value-Based Modifier, and Meaningful Use). Since that time, CMS has increased the requirements while working to reduce the reporting burden for clinicians.

Eligible clinicians participate in one of two QPP paths: the Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS) or Advanced Alternative Payment Models (APMs). Payment adjustments for clinicians participating in MIPS are based on performance in four categories: Quality, Improvement Activities, Promoting Interoperability and Cost. Clinicians choose performance measures and activities best suited to their practice and specialty. Annual performance on MIPS determines a practice's future Medicare reimbursement. Based on the annual score, practices receive a negative, neutral or positive payment adjustment. The score required to receive a neutral payment adjustment has increased each year since the QPP program was introduced in 2017, and was legislatively determined when the program was developed.

This QI Snapshot features the improvement journey of a small practice that adopted MIPS performance metrics and goals with the help of the TMF QPP-SURS team.

### Project Overview

#### TMF Intervention Approach

The TMF QPP-SURS team works with small, rural and/or underserved practices (15 or fewer clinicians) to assist them in reporting and improving their MIPS scores in the four categories. This technical assistance involves different aspects of intervention, including:

- Live webinars
- Help Desk inquiries
- Office hour webinars
- MIPS Toolbox, a free online application that helps track, manage and submit MIPS data
- Virtual coaching, including but not limited to:
  - Assistance with electronic health record (EHR) system data capture
  - Quality measure activities
  - Data analysis, such as reviewing previous and current year's performance
  - Reviewing and modifying workflows to promote data capture and improve MIPS scoring
  - Quality measurement reporting

TMF quality improvement specialists, located throughout TMF's QPP-SURS region, understand the specific needs and challenges of small and rural practices, and are dedicated to helping clinicians meet QPP goals. Via the team's combination of interventions and tailoring assistance to the practice's unique needs, the TMF team has surpassed the bidirectional engagement goals of the contract.

## Meet the Practice: Poole Eye Associates

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Poole Eye Associates is a small, family-owned optometry practice located in Marble Falls, Texas. There are two physicians in the practice; however, only one is MIPS eligible. The practice had no previous quality reporting experience when the TMF team began working with them in 2018.

***In the first year of the program, the practice reported only a few quality measures to avoid negative payment adjustment.***

Throughout the first year of MIPS, education on the reporting requirements was the primary focus for the practice. Additionally, the TMF team worked closely with them to consistently work on process measures and document appropriately. A TMF Health Quality Improvement Specialist (HQIS) worked closely with Poole's practice manager on developing workflows and helping staff be consistent.

***In year 2, Poole reported quality and improvement activities in two MIPS categories and saw a significant jump in scores.***

The TMF HQIS and practice manager reviewed dashboards to evaluate Poole's performance and determine needed improvements and documentation. For example, the practice's EHR dashboard showed low compliance with Diabetic Eye Exams. Poole is consistent in providing this care to their diabetic patients; therefore, they knew this did not accurately reflect the work performed by the clinic staff.

The practice manager then collaborated with the providers to determine where EHR workflows could increase MIPS scores. The practice manager and staff members then implemented those modifications to improve performance.

***In year 3, Poole's MIPS score increased even more, scoring 71 points, when only 30 were required to receive a neutral payment adjustment for the year.***

At this point, the TMF HQIS noticed the practice was doing the work required, but they were not consistent with documentation. The HQIS suggested that the practice manager work with their EHR vendor to set up workflows so that necessary data was consistently collected for MIPS reporting. The providers were involved in developing EHR templates to encourage efficient and consistent documentation. This resulted in greater provider engagement in the improvement process.

Throughout this process, the TMF HQIS provided assistance via one-on-one virtual meetings and email. As the practice has relied heavily on the TMF HQIS for support and answers, they talk at least monthly, assuring that the practice manager has all the knowledge needed to be successful in their MIPS performance.

When the QPP-SURS contract ends, Poole Eye Associates will be able to work on their own, having the foundation for success.

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## The Practice Experience

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At the end of 2020, TMF Innovation team reached out to the practice manager at Poole Eye Associates for feedback regarding their experience working with the TMF QPP-SURS team. Below is a summary of her response.

*"I reached out to TMF through Googling "help with MIPS." [The HQIS] from TMF is incredible. She has helped me tremendously. I actually had no idea what I was getting myself into, not knowing a lot about MIPS. She is always so kind and patient when explaining it all to me, so that I can understand and make the choice myself.*

*I have been 'WebEx-ing' with [her] for approximately three years. We plan meetings periodically to make sure reports are working, and looking to see the data is pulling through correctly. Then we discuss how I can help improve them, if possible.*

*No one (at our practice) reported until I started around 2017 with my TMF HQIS. Now we report each year despite the hurdles, and improving the score leaps and bounds every year. The way MIPS is set up is easy to understand, but the scoring is difficult. The stress comes from understanding what needs to be done to do well in the time allotted.*

*My TMF HQIS makes sure I will be OK if I am audited by discouraging anything that I cannot prove, printing the proof, and keeping a MIPS file for every year. My goal is to improve our score this year, and hopefully get us to the perfect score."*

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## Conclusions

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Poole Eye Associates achieved success by making MIPS a priority within the practice. The practice manager regularly reviewed their MIPS reports, which allowed them to continually identify areas for improvement. Throughout the year, Poole was aware of their performance and actively worked to improve.

Collaboration was also a key to success. Providers were engaged throughout the process and felt ownership in their quality reporting. The providers led the initiative to build EHR templates, as they were most familiar with the documentation and clinical workflow requirements. The standardized workflows facilitated consistency in documentation within their EHR.

Finally, Poole Eye Associates saw success through incremental improvements. Each year they implemented processes and workflows that would build on the previous year's success. This has allowed them to meet and exceed the increasing requirements for MIPS reporting.

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## Recommendations

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The TMF QPP-SURS team has helped many small practices like Poole Eye Associates adopt quality improvement and improve their performance metrics. TMF recommends the following strategies and steps to help practices achieve success in MIPS reporting:

1. Learn about the MIPS program. There are many useful resources available at these websites:
  - CMS QPP website: <https://qpp.cms.gov/>
  - CMS QPP-SURS website: <https://qpp.cms.gov/resources/small-underserved-rural-practices>

- TMF QPP-SURS website: <https://tmfnetworks.org/Networks/Quality-Payment-Program>
2. If the practice has 15 or fewer clinicians, technical assistance is available until February 2022.
    - Use this link to find out where to get assistance: <https://qpp.cms.gov/resources/small-underserved-rural-practices>
  3. Review MIPS eligibility of clinicians at: <https://qpp.cms.gov/participation-lookup>
  4. Review the practice's previous performance on MIPS.
    - Previous year's performance can be found by logging into the QPP Portal: <https://qpp.cms.gov/login>
  5. Identify gaps in performance to improve MIPS scoring and take corrective actions.
  6. Identify quality measures to report and begin collecting data.
  7. Determine improvement activities to implement.
  8. Work with the practice's EHR vendor to implement automated data capture.
  9. If reporting quality measures using claims data, be sure that claims are coded correctly for reporting.
  10. Monitor performance throughout the year, and modify workflows as needed to improve performance.
  11. Keep each clinician's [HCQIS Access Roles and Profile \(HARP\)](#), [Provider Enrollment, Chain, and Ownership System \(PECOS\)](#), and [National Plan and Provider Enumeration System \(NPPES\)](#) accounts up to date.
  12. Apply for any exceptions by the deadlines established by CMS.
  13. Submit data.