

Voices from the Field

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ACCSIS Appalachia

A Q&A with members of the HealthSource of Ohio – Seaman Family Practice (Seaman, Ohio) ACCSIS Implementation Team on how they were able to successfully navigate the COVID-19 pandemic *Heather Bitzer (Practice Coordinator), Kim Stone (Medical Assistant), and Sarah Miller (Care Coordinator & Health Center Champion) shared their perspectives.*



HealthSource of Ohio – Seaman Family Practice, Seaman, OH

What were your biggest challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The biggest challenge was the constant changes we had to make. We used telehealth visits for most of our appointments and that was a difficult adjustment. We also tried to mail education and other materials to patients. The challenge was letting staff and patients know about the changes and how those changes were necessary to make sure patients received the care they needed.

What did you do to try to overcome challenges with CRC screening during this time?

We continued educating and encouraging patients to complete their screenings. Because the area hospitals stopped surgeries, we let our patients know that they could complete a test at home by using Cologuard or a FIT test. Some of our patients didn't want to go to the hospital, and the at-home test options worked well for them. Other patients asked for a colonoscopy, but more home tests were done during the pandemic. The other challenge was if a patient had a positive test result, it took a lot of time and effort to get people in for a follow-up diagnostic test.

Your CRC screening numbers continued to improve during the pandemic. How did you manage to do this?

A big part of maintaining colorectal screening was giving patients the option of doing the test at home instead of going to the hospital. They would choose one or the other – a Cologuard or a FIT test. We also continued to use our recall list, and we followed up

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with patients who hadn't yet completed their test. In a way, we used the processes we already had in place, but with some modifications. Fewer patients were coming in, and we were mailing FIT tests to them or ordering Cologuard tests for them to complete at home.

What advice would you give to other health centers that struggled with CRC screening during the pandemic and in its' aftermath?

Make sure everyone is on the same page with changes and recognizes that workflow modifications are necessary. Adjustments will continue as the situation changes. Everyone needs to be on the same page to continue outreach to educate patients on CRC screening. Letting patients know that they have several options is important. Some patients are fearful of hospital procedures, and at-home options help them to stay on top of their health.