



The Value of a Kidney Population Health Management Program:

THE HEALTH PLAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Health plans have a unique challenge when it comes to managing their members with chronic kidney disease (CKD) and end-stage renal disease (ESRD). Not only is kidney disease a notoriously costly condition, but it is also highly complex and requires unique expertise and experience to be managed effectively. To improve health outcomes and lower the cost of care for this population, many health plans turn to third-party organizations, such as Healthmap Solutions, that specialize in Kidney Population Health Management. In looking at the health plan's perspective on the value of a Kidney Population Health Management program, we turned to **Elizabeth Malko, MD**, a well-known and experienced health plan chief medical officer (CMO) who is currently a senior advisor with Healthmap Solutions.

Dr. Malko is a primary care physician (PCP) with over 30 years of experience. She served as a health plan CMO with some of the most respected and recognized health plans on the East Coast. During her tenure, Dr. Malko was known as a medical leader who was willing to make material changes to the current healthcare landscape and bring market disruption to healthcare populations that are identified as high-cost and high-trend populations. For example, in 2010, Dr. Malko was the first CMO in the United States to bring attention to and change the high-cost, high-trend paradigm of sleep medicine by working with the first vendor within what is now known as the Sleep Benefit Management (SBM) industry. Most recently, she was CMO at one of the first health plans in the country that pursued a Kidney Population Health Management vendor solution to manage the needs of the health plan's members, improve member outcomes, and lower costs.

In 2019, Dr. Malko encouraged her organization to partner with Healthmap Solutions (Healthmap) to manage their CKD and ESRD members. The health plan has now been partnered with Healthmap for four years and has seen material savings and improved outcomes for eligible members. We sat down with Dr. Malko to discuss her experience as a client of Healthmap and hear her thoughts on the value of working with vendors to manage complex, high-cost kidney members.

For health plans, what are the benefits of working with a population health management company like Healthmap, rather than building an in-house program to manage members with CKD/ESRD?

Dr. Malko: I encourage health plans to consider working with vendors with unique expertise for extremely high-cost conditions, including kidney disease. Some health plans will try to build their own program, but they just don't have the expertise and scale they need to be successful. Unless they are going to hire nephrologists and a team of nurses with renal experience, the program won't be comprehensive enough. For example, we know we need to educate members on renal replacement therapy options such as home dialysis, but this just isn't something that health plans usually do. Even if the health plan can engage the members in case management and tell them about the different types of treatment, they won't know where to go from there. They also need to have conversations with the members' PCP and nephrologist, make sure the member is prepared for dialysis, and connect them with the right specialists to manage next steps. If the member is considering transplant, they need to be connected with a local transplant center. For health plans, all of this is really outside of their skill set, and they just can't build a program with all of those capabilities on their own. The fact that Healthmap has a team of clinicians who understand renal disease and can identify and counsel members, while also engaging their providers and giving them the information and data they need, is so valuable.

What factors do health plans need to discuss and align on when partnering with an external Kidney Population Health Management company?

Dr. Malko: It's crucial to be clear about how you will identify members, what the eligible population will include, and what member engagement rates will look like so that both parties can set expectations. I also think you need to align on your methodologies up front and show each other your equations. What is our methodology for calculating savings? What is included in the total medical expense of the population? What is excluded? It might be a lot of work, but you have to have those conversations.

What are the most important key performance indicators (KPIs) that health plans use to measure the success of a Kidney Population Health Management program?

Dr. Malko: Throughout the partnership, risk scores and anything around closing gaps in care are going to be critical. In the early stages of a contract, before you're able to show savings, we're mainly looking at provider and member engagement. We want to make sure the vendor is achieving the agreed-upon engagement rates. Then, down the line, we obviously want to see savings on total medical expenses, and the percentage of members that the vendor has been able to get into home-based dialysis and transplant. We also look at the inpatient utilization and the emergency room utilization rates. Ideally, the vendor should be able to show that the members who were eligible and engaged in the program have shown a reduction in utilization.

Do you feel that working with Healthmap can improve member satisfaction?

Dr. Malko: Yes, definitely. We know that when members are engaged in a program with a case management component, their satisfaction scores with the health plan are significantly higher than those who are not in a program. As a patient, if you've gone through a tough clinical experience and you had a case manager who really went to bat for you, you couldn't be more thankful for your health plan. Having someone like a Healthmap Care Navigator on your side can make a big difference for a patient.

Do you feel that working with Healthmap can lower costs for health plans and provide a valuable ROI?

Dr. Malko: Absolutely. We wouldn't have engaged with Healthmap if we didn't believe in the ROI, and we wouldn't have renewed our contract if we didn't get that ROI. Health plans are also looking for substantial savings in addition to the ROI, and we certainly saw that value in our experience with Healthmap.

What do you believe is the most important takeaway for other health plans considering implementing a Kidney Population Health Management program?

Dr. Malko: Using a vendor *will* result in better financial outcomes, quality outcomes, and health outcomes. Health plans just can't manage these members effectively on their own. My advice to health plans when looking at vendors is to find one with a good track record. You want to work with a vendor whose other clients tell you that they are collaborative, communicative, and willing to be flexible. In my experience with Healthmap, I get a thoughtful, carefully crafted response 100% of the time. Their team does what they say they are going to do, and they're very responsive. That goes a long way, and that's what you want to hear when you're choosing a vendor.

You have had the opportunity to assess many of the kidney health management vendors in the market today. What was it that separated Healthmap from the others in your decision-making process?

Dr. Malko: Provider outreach and engagement was one of the critical selling points for Healthmap. I appreciate that Healthmap works with members with Stage 3 CKD and starts engaging with their providers early on to try to slow their disease progression. That early engagement makes a big difference in outcomes. I also know that with CKD, you need to collaborate with multiple providers and specialists on the patient's care team to truly have an impact, so Healthmap's broad approach to provider engagement, especially their work with PCPs, is very valuable. You can't just talk to the nephrologists, especially with members in the earlier CKD stages who may only have a PCP. Plus, PCPs have so much going on as it is, and CKD is so complicated. As a PCP myself, I know that understanding renal disease is hard. There's so much to know, and the recommendations are always changing. As a health plan executive, I want to be able to help PCPs figure out who their CKD patients are, give them the tools and resources to help

educate those patients, and make sure they are seeing a nephrologist regularly. Having Healthmap do that for us is enormously helpful.

It was also important to us that Healthmap was already active in our region. The fact that the program was already up and running in our geography gave us some peace of mind. The Healthmap team knew the providers already, and we knew that they had been able to set up a program here without issues.

Finally, it's important to me that vendors are flexible and easy to work with. As a client, I've been very impressed by Healthmap's ability to be collaborative and build a firm relationship. They are willing to get things done and always remain positive. I've heard nothing but good things from my colleagues about working with the Healthmap team.

At Healthmap Solutions, we are thankful to have collaborative partnerships with each of our clients. Our Kidney Population Health Management program can support health plans by offering the expertise and resources needed to effectively manage complex and costly kidney disease populations. To achieve better financial outcomes, quality outcomes, and health outcomes, health plans can trust in our team's commitment to delivering exceptional service and results.



Elizabeth Malko, MD

Elizabeth Malko, MD is a passionate physician executive consultant and owner of Malko Consulting, LLC. She previously served as Chief Medical Officer at multiple health plans. Dr. Malko received a B.S. in Biology and a master's degree in Environmental Engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. She earned her medical degree at the University of Connecticut, is board certified in Family Practice, and is a Fellow of the American Academy of Family Practice.



To learn more about how Healthmap Solutions can help your patients with kidney disease achieve better health outcomes, please visit www.healthmapsolutions.com
