



## Case study

# How Shannon Gray is boosting resident and community outcomes

**Optum partnership delivers proactive care, personal connections that prevent problems ‘before they arise’**

Before David Dunn joined Shannon Gray Rehabilitation & Recovery Center in Jamestown, N.C., he’d never worked in a senior community that offered residents with complex and chronic conditions extra levels of personalized care through an Institutional Special Needs Plan (ISNP).

Now, after 10 years of working in partnership with the Optum care model, he says he never wants to “go back to a world without it.”

“I really can’t emphasize the benefits enough,” said Dunn, a former nurse who is now COO of Shannon Gray. “We see really positive outcomes among the residents who are on the plan. The focus is on being proactive, preventing hospitalizations, preventing problems before they arise.”

And in this post-pandemic era of tight staffing, it’s “been a godsend ... just additional resources, an extra set of eyes when there are so many holes that can be created by the layers and levels of care.”

**Optum**



## Patient-centric model 'goes above and beyond'

One of the original innovators of ISNPs, the Optum care model is patient-centric, bringing highly trained, experienced clinicians and care teams into communities to coordinate and oversee care of member residents.

The teams are led by advanced practice clinicians (APCs) who are either nurse practitioners or physician assistants. They make regular visits to member communities, coordinating and reviewing resident care across what are often multiple doctors and therapists.

But it's not just the extra in-community care that makes the plan so valuable, Dunn said. "It's the people Optum puts on its teams. They go above and beyond. ... It's the caring, the corporate support they provide. They're very important members of our team."

And that is more important than ever as nursing communities are struggling to find qualified caregivers.

"It's a diminishing pool. It's a precious resource," he said. "Not just finding people who will show up, but finding people who want to be there and give the type of care that we expect and that we need."

With Optum, the APC is on site, able to deliver personal care. And the ratio of members is low enough that it allows them to "have that extra time so the resident doesn't feel like a number or feel like they are being rushed."

"We've all been in a doctor's office where we've not gotten the time that we needed, or unfortunately, maybe an emergency waiting room where we don't feel like the time was there to give us what we needed. That's not the case with Optum."



## Providing the human touch through personal connections

One of the key benefits of the partnership, Dunn said, is the very personal relationships the Optum teams forge with residents, families, even staff.

"I've seen how the Optum nurse practitioners will sit in the room or sit at the nurses' station and talk with them – not just as residents, but as friends," Dunn said. "They'll ask how their grandkids are doing. They're involved in their life."

The Optum team members also stay in close contact with residents' families, which eases the strain on Shannon Gray staff.

When the state shut down visitation to nursing communities during the early months of the pandemic, Dunn said, many families were extremely stressed about not being able to visit.

The Optum APC stepped in to ease anxiety when family members felt disconnected. Besides keeping families updated on resident care, Dunn said they helped keep lines of communication open between residents and families – sometimes helping them make "multiple phone calls over the course of a single day."

“That extra level of connectivity to the Optum provider was a huge support to families,” he said.

There was one family that was particularly stressed during the pandemic because their mother really wanted to reach 100, and they were intent on helping her achieve that goal. The Optum APC was instrumental in keeping the resident and families both connected and educated about the aging process and what to expect.

“She would not have made it if not for the Optum APC,” who he said provided constant support, even on weekends, to the resident and the family.

“Managing that family, meeting their expectations, we could not have done that without the Optum support,” Dunn said. “Why, because the nurse practitioner made a connection, and that helped ease their anxiety.”



## Responsive, efficient support eases staff burdens

That extra support has helped Shannon Gray staff focus more on their key responsibilities.

Besides overseeing and managing the often fragmented care residents receive from multiple doctors, the Optum team helps staff nurses – and, more importantly, workers who don’t have as high a level of medical training – identify issues on the spot, without having to wait for callbacks from resident doctors.

“It’s so much easier for them to be able to say, ‘Hey, can you come down here and look at this? Something just doesn’t seem right.’ That has happened countless times,” Dunn said.

The nurse practitioners, he said, can order labs and get quick results to help nail down and then help explain what’s going on to staff, residents and their families.

“I think our nurses see them as just as important as our medical director,” Dunn said. “And that’s to take nothing away from our medical director. But the Optum team is on site, they are responsive and so efficient. “



## Better surveys, better ratings

That in-depth care and the nurse practitioners’ personal connections and thorough case notes have been invaluable in helping Shannon Gray respond to surveys and boost its ratings.

“We’re on the cusp of being a 4-star building,” Dunn said. “I know for a fact that we have had survey outcomes that would have been different if not for the Optum team, if not for the person who could sit down with a surveyor and explain what was done and why.”

The Optum team takes ownership and accountability for its members. Dunn credits Shannon Gray's survey record for that, which he said is very strong compared to state and national averages. And that's important in today's world, he said, "where you can get tagged for anything."

"We've had situations that maybe could have been considered deficient practice, if not for that Optum person who has that medical credential and that respect and that knowledge and who's very adept at speaking without talking in circles," Dunn said. "They answer the questions very honestly and they're not afraid to defend the facility or what they did."



## Attracting and retaining residents

Besides losing staff, nursing communities since the pandemic have seen shrinking resident numbers. Being able to offer the added benefits provided by Optum helps Shannon Gray attract and retain residents, Dunn said.

And even if residents don't sign up initially, many residents or their families will come in and ask about it after seeing the care other residents are getting.

"They'll come to the front office and ask to speak to someone or schedule a visit because they see their roommate or the person across the hallway getting all that extra attention, the additional care and time and compassion and the outcomes Optum members are achieving," Dunn said.

Although Shannon Gray leaves the selling up to Optum, "We do brag about it. We do talk about how positive it is. It always tickles me when I see them come to the front and say, 'Hey, I'd like to be a member myself.'"

And Dunn said he would have to dig "hard and deep" to find residents or family members who aren't satisfied with the plan.

"Forget about me being satisfied," he said. "What's important is the end user. The ones who go on the product and stay. Enrollment vs. disenrollment is extremely high."

Indeed, data from Optum shows 92% of members are satisfied with the plan, and 95% of stay on the plan for life.<sup>1</sup>



## Happy residents, happy families and better outcomes

Although Shannon Gray doesn't have hard data on how the partnership has improved outcomes, Optum data shows communities in the plan have 40% fewer hospital admissions when the care team evaluates appropriate care.<sup>2</sup>

Dunn says that tracks with his observations, because the proactive care helps identify problems early, preventing declines.

Whether it's alerting staff that a resident needs to be repositioned to prevent skin breakdowns or catching early signs of depression, that constant oversight and help getting referrals to therapy has helped residents retain mobility, prevent falls and fight depression.

“Early identification and referrals are so important,” he said. “Let’s be honest, what’s easier? Preventing decline or treating and having to deal with it?”

While families and residents don’t necessarily think of it in the terms of outcomes, “they think about their loved one and the quality of care. Did we prevent decline? Was there a hip fracture? Did we prevent depression? Have we prevented pneumonia? Have we prevented rehospitalization? Those are all outcomes.”

For family members, he said, it’s simply knowing that their loved one is doing better.

“I try to put myself in their shoes,” Dunn said. “If it was my loved one, this is the question: Would I sign them up for Optum? Yes, I would do it in a heartbeat.”

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Learn more about the Optum care model. **Visit:** [optum.com/snf](https://optum.com/snf)

1. 2021 Member Satisfaction Survey, Optum Consumer Experience Research Program.
2. McGarry BE, Grabowski DC. Managed care for long-stay nursing home residents: An evaluation of Institutional Special Needs Plans. *Am J Manag Care.* 2019;25(9):438-443.



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