

## CASE STUDY

### Benefits

- Cost Reduction
- Process Improvement
- Employee Engagement
- 1,290 lbs of waste diverted
- 5,736 prescriptions for uninsured, low income patients

### The Problem

It's estimated that \$2.2 billion in sample medications provided to medical practices go to waste each year, meanwhile millions of uninsured patients go without the medications they need due to cost. Additionally, Joint Commission reports that the mismanagement of medications (including sample medications inside medical practices) is one of the top ten most common infractions. Physicians and staff commonly dispose of samples as non-hazardous waste and without required documentation, and the medications end up in landfills or our water system. Others utilize the hospital pharmacy and reverse distribution contracts to dispose of sample medications as hazardous waste, increasing the cost of disposal.

### The Strategy Selected

In the late 1990s, the FDA approved the donation of drug samples from a licensed practitioner to a charitable institution for use by the patients of a charitable institution. By donating sample medications to the Dispensary of Hope, a non-profit organization that redistributes surplus medications to the uninsured, medical practices can realize a substantial diversion of medications from waste streams while increasing compliance, generating cost-savings, and providing medications to patients that would otherwise go without.

Sentara Healthcare discontinued the use of sample medications throughout Sentara Medical Group, and after donating to local clinics, donated the remaining surplus to the Dispensary of Hope.



### Implementation Process

The implementation process was led by Sentara Medical Group's Clinical Pharmacy Specialist who worked with each practice manager to coordinate the process. Each practice received a "Hope Box" from the Dispensary of Hope to fill with sample medications. The practice manager then used the prepaid shipping label to ship the box back to the Dispensary of Hope. Once processed, each practice received an itemized report of the medications donated along with a new Hope Box if additional samples remained. The Dispensary of Hope provided a final rollup report to Sentara Medical Group for record keeping.

### Challenges and Lessons Learned

Many of the practices first wanted to offer their sample medications to local charitable clinics. This was permitted and encouraged; however, due to the size of the medical group and the volume of samples, the clinics were unable to accept them all. We had to ensure we did not inadvertently create additional costs or storage issues for the clinics at the same time as trying to help.

Additionally, it was difficult to predict how many Hope Boxes were needed for each practice based on the volume of samples in the practice. However, the Dispensary of Hope was quick to send more if the volume was larger than originally predicted.

### Demographic Information

Sentara Medical Group, a division of Sentara Healthcare, has more than 380 primary care and specialty physicians located across Southeast Virginia and Northeast North Carolina.