

## Proven experience and trust pave the way to better care for residents, benefits for business



### Optum and Gulf Coast Health Care rise to challenges from COVID-19 to implement value-based care program for residents

*Optum partners with health plans like a UnitedHealthcare Nursing Home Plan to deliver clinical care and specialized health care benefits to residents of long-term skilled nursing facilities. They do so by adding an advanced practice clinician (APC), either a nurse practitioner or physician assistant (often supported by a registered nurse), in facilities to directly support their members, improve quality of care and, ultimately, help reduce hospitalizations and emergency room visits, improve Star ratings and deliver shared savings. The program is most effective when there is a strong collaboration with partners like Gulf Coast Health Care (GCHC).*

In March 2020, states across the country — along with families, businesses and local governments — were scrambling to meet the new demands and challenges that came with managing a global pandemic — the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Hospitals, health care workers, skilled nursing facilities (SNFs) and assisted living communities found themselves on the front lines of the disease. SNFs needed to prevent the disease from spreading among residents and staff, and needed to continue to provide outstanding care to their residents.

For Gulf Coast Health Care, that meant speeding up the time frame for the introduction of a UnitedHealthcare Nursing Home Plan, with the Optum care model to five of its facilities.

Optum and GCHC had already developed a long-standing relationship — one that goes back more than five years. The Optum care model was already available at 12 of GCHC's facilities. Fortunately, this relationship had laid the foundation of trust and experience for these two teams to work together, which was particularly important during the unprecedented times everyone was experiencing in early 2020.

[optum.com/snf](https://optum.com/snf)



- Skilled nursing facility chain
- Originally founded in 1994
- 43 skilled nursing and long-term care facilities
- Located in Florida and Mississippi
- 4,730 beds



#### Optum/Gulf Coast by the numbers<sup>1</sup>

- Optum is active in **more than 19** GCHC SNFs.
- Optum supports care for **642 residents**.
- **15** Optum clinicians are on site at those facilities.

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“We share a lot of values, including an innovative approach to providing programs for our residents,” explains Brett Barnett, president of Gulf Coast Health Care. “That alignment makes for a seamless partnership — one based on trust and experience. And that certainly comes in handy when you’re looking to launch a program in the middle of a global pandemic.”

Optum also recognized GCHC as a strong partner. Known throughout the Southeast for delivering outstanding care to residents, GCHC consistently earns top ratings in the industry.<sup>2</sup>

### **High-quality care for residents, benefits for business**

In order to help and support residents during COVID-19, Optum and GCHC found themselves faced with a compressed time frame in which to roll out the Optum care model.

Residents who sign up for a partnering health plan, like a UnitedHealthcare Nursing Home Plan get hands-on care from a dedicated Optum APC. The Optum APC works closely to bridge communication gaps between the nursing home staff and the resident’s primary care provider to monitor drug interactions and medication adherence, as well as prescribe medications and make referrals to specialists.

“Not only were the residents able to take advantage of all the ‘standard’ benefits that come with the health plan, but an APC was now available to connect with the patients’ families. This was a welcomed benefit when loved ones weren’t able to get in to see a family member for themselves,” explains MaryAnn Loiselle, nursing home administrator (NHA) for Gulf Coast Health Care center, at Ocean Springs Health and Rehabilitation Center.

Ocean Springs Health and Rehabilitation Center is a GCHC facility that introduced the Optum product to residents in early spring 2020. A well-known and respected center in the GCHC family, Ocean Springs Health and Rehabilitation Center has been recognized for its commitment to delivering quality, safe care to residents. It earned the 2019 NRC Health Customer Approved Award, which acknowledges the delivery of an outstanding care experience for residents and families. Ocean Springs Health and Rehabilitation Center has also been awarded the American Health Care Association (AHCA) National Quality Silver Award as recognition for its high-quality, exceptional care.

Another nursing home administrator at Gulf Coast Health Care’s Margate Health and Rehabilitation Center has worked with Optum for the past few years at her facility. The five-star CMS rated facility is well known in the region.<sup>3</sup> The staff delivers exceptional, safe care to residents and has been recognized by industry organizations with awards just as the distinctive 2019 NRC Health Customer Approved Award and the AHCA National Quality Silver Award. Margate Health and Rehabilitation Center was also recognized as a 2020 Top Nursing Home in Florida by *Newsweek* magazine. GCHC agrees that one of the most popular benefits of a United Healthcare Nursing Home Plan is the Optum APC.



“Our nurse practitioner has been invaluable during COVID,” says the administrator. “She works with any physician, so our residents don’t have to change doctors. We are able to help many of our residents avoid unnecessary hospitalizations by identifying and treating illnesses before they were too significant.”

Not only does the APC help keep residents out of the hospital for easily treatable conditions, but the three-day hospital stay requirement is waived, so the process for residents to be eligible for a skilled nursing stay is seamless.

“If one of our residents needs skilled nursing and that resident is a part of the Optum program, we can work with our nurse practitioner to get them the care they need — without an unnecessary trip to the hospital,” says the Margate NHA.

GCHC also points out another benefit of having an APC on-site during COVID-19. “Our on-site nurse practitioner doesn’t just provide extra eyes and hands for our residents, but also for our staff. She really helps with the burden of care when it comes to immediate medical issues associated with possible COVID exposures. That was an ever-evolving situation in nursing.”

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— Nursing home administrator at Gulf Coast Health Care

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**Along with an APC to provide collaborative care, patients can also take advantage of many other benefits of the health plan, which could include:**

- On-site flu shots
- On-site visits with podiatry, dentists, optometrists and others
- Hearing aids
- Qualifying medical supplies and equipment

“Residents get very excited about the benefits of the plan,” MaryAnn shares. “It’s hard to have to wait every two years to get a new pair of eyeglasses or pair of hearing aids, and with a UnitedHealthcare Nursing Home Plan you don’t have to wait that long.”

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Optum also delivers benefits to partnering facilities, and it was these opportunities that Brett first recognized in the Optum program.

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**“ I realized early in our partnership that Optum delivers on value-based care. By partnering with Optum, we are able to deliver the highest level of care to our patients in a more cost-effective manner. ”**

– Brett Barnett, president at Gulf Coast Health Care

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This helps GCHC invest in their facilities, including during a global pandemic. For a company dedicated to delivering innovative, safe care for their patients, this is particularly important.

MaryAnn sees that at Ocean Springs Health and Rehabilitation Center, too. “We can take any cost savings or quality incentives we receive through the Optum partnership and put them right back into our facility for our residents.”

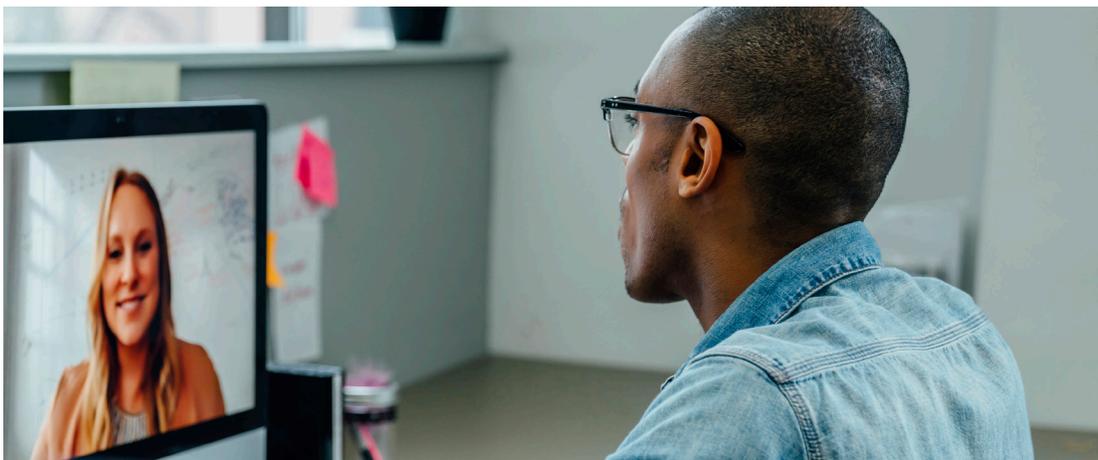
**“And when residents are healthier and happier, everyone wins,”** says MaryAnn. Brett echoes MaryAnn’s sentiment: **“If Optum wasn’t good for our residents, we wouldn’t partner with them — no matter the business benefits we receive. For us, it comes down to supporting and caring for our residents.”**

That focus is shared at Optum, too. “Our partnerships and products start and end with residents,” empathically states Michael Spartano, regional vice president of sales at Optum.

## **A proven process, innovative leadership**

*Optum has been working with skilled nursing facilities for over 25 years. And during that time, they have refined a proven process for launching the Optum care model with new partners.*

*“We have a structured implementation plan that allows us to do the same steps every time. It’s repeatable. It’s scalable,” says Michael. “We normally launch a building in 120 days, but with COVID we were working under an extremely condensed timeline that had to shift completely to a web-based environment.”*



“Even with those challenges, our process is a solid foundation that allows us to be flexible, innovative and agile to meet the needs of our partners and their residents,” he finishes.

That web-based relationship turned out to be vital.

“We were able to take all our tools and steps and turn it into a virtual launch. We had to be creative and open-minded, but we did it with the dedication of our team and the team at GCHC,” adds Doni Pitcher, implementation manager at Optum.

At the heart of the Optum process is communication. It’s constant, ongoing communication that helps build trust and comfort in launching the Optum care model at any time and especially during a global pandemic.

“Each of our steps are important and they all rely on communication,” Doni explains. “You can’t communicate too much. We wanted to be sure everyone felt valued and heard as we launched during a very overwhelming time for Gulf Coast. We were there to support them however we could.”

COVID-19 sped up the implementation process in about half the time. The focus the entire time was on the residents.

“At the end of the day, our goal is to offer a best-in-class health plan. If we can get that to them a month earlier, everyone wins — especially during the stress of COVID,” says Michael.

That emphasis and focus was felt at facilities, too.

“We’ve had a lot of new members in the last three months,” says the Margate NHA. “Family and friends aren’t able to come and visit their loved ones. They want to transition to a plan where someone is going to be on-site; someone’s family knows they can contact us if there is any question or concern.”

“We had many conversations about how we would shift our operational strategies to roll out the product safely for our residents, our staff and the Optum team,” Brett says.

“We had to switch on a dime when COVID-19 started affecting our communities,” says MaryAnn. “We were about to start with the rollout but had to change our plan in the middle of the game. With Optum’s experience, there were no hiccups. They did a great job, and so did my team.”

For Optum and GCHC, that meant shifting a process and relationships built in-person to online meetings.

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Doni quickly started meeting with administrators virtually — a channel everyone was quickly getting familiar with in days of stay-at-home orders and visitor restrictions at skilled nursing facilities and long-term care centers. It also meant looking for ways to enable connections between Optum staff, residents and their families. The answer, again, came down to technology.

“Optum provided iPads to each facility that needed them so we could meet with residents and their families to explain our product and its benefits,” explains Doni. “We also wanted people to be able to make informed decisions, so Optum developed webinars for interested individuals to log in to and learn more about the product.”

The Margate NHA, who had worked with Optum before the pandemic changed many of their processes, also noted the smooth shift to virtual meetings. “Our administrators and enrollment team worked very well with family members, connecting them with Optum through their choice of communication.”

Optum’s success also comes from more than empathy and process. It starts with experience.

“We have a solid plan that’s been developed over years of experience. We understand and adhere to very complicated Medicare marketing guidelines. We know how to take the product and get it to the residents,” Michael states.

### **Supporting staff during unprecedented times**

It goes without saying that the true heroes of this time were the staff members delivering care and supporting residents at each of the facilities. The last thing Optum wanted was to add another item on an already lengthy to-do list.

Instead, Optum teams sent signs, t-shirts and food to the care teams at GCHC facilities rolling out the product. “Their world was turned upside down in a matter of days,” says Doni. “We wanted them to know we were there for them however they needed us.”

“They fed us so well,” laughs MaryAnn. “Food is always a great motivator and during COVID, it showed that they were willing to support us however they could.”

Another surprising benefit of launching the product in the middle of a global pandemic was it that provided a much-needed distraction.



“It gave us something else to talk about besides coronavirus,” MaryAnn explains. “We knew that we were launching a product that required heavy lifting upfront, but I knew from working with them previously that once the process started it took care of itself. It was worth the temporary effort for our residents.”



### **A lasting partnership**

For Optum and GCHC, their partnership extends far beyond COVID-19 and meeting a temporary need. It's based on supporting each other, listening and caring for residents.

“When you work with Optum, it really is a partnership. We really work in tandem as a team with the same goals and values,” the Margate NHA says.

She continues, “It's very family-focused and resident focused. It's truly about providing services to residents so that families feel comfortable and confident with the care their loved one is receiving.”

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**“ Great people make Optum a great partner. They are always on top of business needs and goals. Optum has a progressive program, committed to supporting residents and delivering the care and benefits they need. ”**

– Brett Barnett, president at Gulf Coast Health Care

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## The Optum advantage

Optum works closely with providers to provide bedside care and case management to more than 70,000 members of participating health plans in more than 1,800 skilled nursing facilities<sup>2</sup> across the United States. This partnership goes far beyond delivering better health care. It is helping physicians move forward with value-based health care with on-site APCs that deliver:

- Collaborative care for better outcomes
- A multidisciplinary team to close the care coordination gap
- Evidence-based treatment methods and preventive care to reduce hospitalizations<sup>3</sup>
- Reduced costs with streamlined care delivery and efficient tools
- Digital engagement tools like telemedicine
- Constant communications to improve care coordination and implementation
- Improved patient and family satisfaction<sup>4</sup>



## Gulf Coast Health Care

includes 43 skilled nursing centers and two assisted living locations throughout Florida and Mississippi. Our 6,000-plus team members share a passion and purpose to take a proactive approach to meet the needs of residents and patients. We are each guided by our mission to create a legacy of unsurpassed care that evolves to meet the changing health care needs of all our patients and their families.

1. 2020 Plan Year, reporting as of September 2020.
2. [gchc.com/about/awards](http://gchc.com/about/awards).
3. [medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare/profile.html#profTab=0&ID=105505&Distn=7015.2&state=FL&lat=0&lng=0&name=margate](https://www.medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare/profile.html#profTab=0&ID=105505&Distn=7015.2&state=FL&lat=0&lng=0&name=margate).
4. McGarry BE, Grabowski DC. Managed care for long-stay nursing home residents: An evaluation of Institutional Special Needs Plans. *American Journal of Managed Care*. 2019;25(9):400-405.

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**Learn more about how Optum can improve the care in your facility and help you meet your strategic business goals.**

Email: [nursing\\_home\\_plan@optum.com](mailto:nursing_home_plan@optum.com)

Phone: 1-814-212-8612

Visit: [optum.com/snf](http://optum.com/snf)

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11000 Optum Circle, Eden Prairie, MN 55344

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