

# North Star Medical Group



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Doctors who work at Phelps find a wealth of resources, from top-notch equipment to highly trained nurses. And sometimes they find something more: each other, and strength in numbers.

That’s the basic story behind North Star Medical Group, the largest practice in the area, all of whose doctors are also on staff at Phelps. Founded three years ago, “it began when some physicians who had admitting privileges at the Hospital thought there would be advantages to banding together,” explains **Dee Lipka Jones**, RN, MPH, MBA, North Star’s CEO. Fourteen doctors — all of them primary-care physicians — formed the original group. Today, North Star’s medical staff numbers sixteen and consists of internists and family medicine physicians, as well as a pulmonologist and two gastroenterologists, operating out of 11 outpatient offices in the area, from Dobbs Ferry to Buchanan.

The doctors’ hunch proved right: “We’ve found many benefits from collaborating,” says **Dr. Bruce Heckman**, President of North Star. For starters, patient care is flawlessly coordinated: Since all North Star doctors can provide treatment at Phelps, patients admitted to the Hospital

won’t find themselves in the care of unfamiliar physicians. Then there are the economies of scale the group achieves: “We purchase equipment and supplies at a group rate and are also able to negotiate better rates with insurance companies, which benefits both us and our patients,” Jones says.

“In order to broaden our scope of synergistic opportunities, all of the doctors joined Columbia University as Affiliated Physicians. Our relationship allows us to coordinate tertiary care for our patients,” says Heckman.

Jones is pleased that shifts in government policy emphasize primary care: “If you can find and treat illnesses in the early stages, then there’s less utilization of higher-cost measures, like visiting an ER or being admitted to the Hospital. It saves us all precious healthcare dollars,” she says. And it’s in keeping with North Star’s philosophy too: “We provide care to patients along the full spectrum of the life span, from children to the elderly — not only those experiencing acute situations, but also people who need to manage chronic diseases or just maintain their overall good health.”



*North Star’s CEO Dee Lipka Jones, RN, MPH, MBA and Bruce Heckman, MD, North Star President.*

North Star is also on the forefront of data maintenance. "Our health records are electronic, so patient information is accessible to whomever is covering," Jones says. "Even if something happens in the middle of the night, the doctor on call has access to all the necessary background on that patient." Additionally, the group utilizes the relatively new e-prescribing method, where a patient's prescriptions are electronically transmitted to the desired pharmacy in a secure manner. "It reduces medication errors, tracks prescriptions, and highlights contraindications to doctors and pharmacists," Heckman explains. Besides being safer, it's much easier on patients, he notes. "Patients don't have to take a paper prescription with them as they leave the office, then go wait at the pharmacy with all the other sick people, or possibly with a sick child in tow. We transmit the information, and when the patient arrives at the pharmacy, the medicine is frequently ready and waiting."

North Star continues to seek improvements. "We're looking to recruit more physicians into the group to better serve our patients," Jones says. But patients are already more than pleased with the numerous conveniences offered. "We receive plenty of positive feedback. Patients tell us, 'I don't have to worry about my doctor being away if I get sick, because I know there is a whole group of good doctors available to me.'" Jones says. "Our group's reputation is that we strive to work together to provide the best quality care — and that gives a lot of comfort to our patients."

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