

Bringing FQHC Expertise to Pacific NW Health Centers

BY SOPHIA BENNETT

The best doctor-patient relationships are those where a medical practitioner can solve an immediate health problem and speak with an individual about their long-term wellness at the same time.

Jones & Roth CPAs and Business Advisors takes a similar approach when serving the financial needs of their healthcare clients. Although many Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) initially come to the firm looking for help with assurance or compliance, CPAs Brian Newton and Mathew Hamlin see these visits as a chance to work with an organization's staff or board members to make the organization stronger. While they may start out working on an immediate concern like an audit or tax return, they also take the opportunity to answer questions and consult with clinic staff on issues that will increase the organization's wellness over the long term.

"Because of our knowledge and experience, we're already trained on how your organization works...we speak 'FQHC.'"

We Speak "FQHC"

Jones & Roth, one of Oregon's largest CPA firms, has several niche practices within the company. Meeting the specialized needs of healthcare providers and nonprofits has long been an area of focus for the firm. That intersection is what first led Newton, who leads the niche, and Hamlin to respond to an RFP from an FQHC seeking a new audit firm.

They quickly realized they were in a unique position to help these specialized organizations. Since they work with traditional healthcare companies (including insurance payers and providers) and nonprofit clients, they keep up on best practices in both industries. "We understand the full environment they're working in from different angles, which provides another level of experience and expertise because we can talk pretty openly about current events and what's changing from both the nonprofit and federal government compliance perspective," Newton says.

From there they set out to provide their clients with a superior experience. One key component is Newton and Hamlin's commitment to personally serve every FQHC



Brian Newton, CPA
Shareholder



Mathew Hamlin, CPA
Senior Manager

with which they have an engagement. Whether they're preparing or auditing financial statements, doing a single audit for grant compliance, preparing and filing taxes, or providing consulting services, an FQHC can take full advantage of their experience while they're onsite.

"That's very different from the model at other firms," Newton says. "Even if the firm has experience with FQHCs, they often assign the person in the closest office, not the person who actually understands their business model." Newton and Hamlin are committed to their service model no matter how much the niche grows, and they will travel anywhere in the United States to fulfill that promise.

Jones & Roth's ability to provide an FQHC expert every time is the number one thing organizations appreciate, Newton says. "Because of our knowledge and experience in the space, we're already trained on how your organization works. You don't have to take time out of your day to train us.

You can tell us exactly what you're doing on a day-to-day basis and we don't have to ask you to translate anything. We speak 'FQHC.'

Consulting Perspective

While Jones & Roth may come in to work on compliance, FQHCs should look at it as a consulting opportunity, Newton says. "In the course of an audit we have to talk about internal controls. Through the process, we can identify opportunities for better controls and different policies that provide more efficiency and save time."

This approach is different from that at many firms, Hamlin says, but it goes to the heart of what's important to Jones & Roth: establishing good communication and long-term relationships with clients. Every time Newton and Hamlin start a new engagement with a client, they want to understand that organization's goals and objectives and find ways to help them get to where they want to go. For example, he says, Jones & Roth may be able to provide performance ratios to help FQHCs understand trends and metrics, and determine progress toward meeting their financial targets.

"People don't dread our arrival," Hamlin says. "It's more, 'Jones & Roth is coming in, and we're going to have an opportunity to learn something.' That is our intention and we hope that's how they feel."

Industry Trends Look Positive for FQHCs

Based on his experience over the last few years, Newton believes industry trends are going in a direction that's positive for FQHCs.

Today, government regulators are more focused on finding ways to better serve people in the health care system. Quality is a harder thing to measure, but Newton is seeing some positive developments. If FQHCs apply for new designations such as patient-centered primary care homes, they are eligible for a bump in fees for every person who designates them as their home base.

As if this wasn't incentive enough, it also gives FQHCs the freedom to help people access other services they need to be healthy. These services can be medical in nature, such as mental health and substance abuse treatment. But they can also be social services, such as referrals to food pantries and affordable housing programs, Newton points out. For FQHCs that are part of social service organizations, it's just another way to meet their mission and goals.

Newton adds "we believe that in the current healthcare environment FQHCs have a bright future and we have made a long term pledge to serve them."

Sophia Bennett is a freelance business writer based in Eugene, Oregon. Her work has appeared in Oregon Business, 1859 Oregon's Magazine and many other publications.



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