



Erica Natal, MHA BSN

Director of Clinical Services, Rockford Gastroenterology Associates, Rockford, IL

For Erica Natal, working as a healthcare quality professional (HQP) represents her opportunity to make an impact.

For nearly 15 years, Natal worked as a registered nurse in the adult intensive care unit before becoming a survey readiness coordinator, where she was responsible for ensuring system-wide compliance with various accreditation and designation standards, including The Joint Commission and Level 1 trauma designation. She also credits this as the job that solidified her identity as an HQP.

"I loved chart abstraction, as well as interpreting The Joint Commission standards," she says. "That kind of detective work really appealed to me."

Inspired to learn more about the business side of healthcare—and driven by the encouragement of her mentor—Natal pursued a master's degree in healthcare administration from the University of Phoenix and moved into various roles at Rockford Health System. She served as manager of the progressive care and step-down intensive care units for 2 years before taking her current role as director of clinical services for Rockford Gastroenterology Associates, an ambulatory surgical center housing one of the largest independent groups of gastroenterology subspecialists in the area, as well as the Rockford Endoscopy Center.

Natal currently is responsible for organizing, directing, and coordinating all aspects of the center's clinical operations, including maintaining its accreditation through the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services; developing performance and process improvement plans by utilizing resources such as GIQuIC and the Illinois State Cancer Registry; managing nursing staff, including ensuring that 100% of the staff maintain certification in these areas and 80% have been certified with the American Board of Certification for Gastroenterology Nurses; and maintaining the center's electronic medical records.

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Natal says one of the greatest challenges to ensuring quality care at her organization is battling the potential dangers found in the everyday routines.

"When you work with the same people every day, and you do things repetitively, there's a tendency to become complacent," she says. "I bring quality issues back to the staff continuously, reminding them that we must follow protocols and procedures because these processes will safeguard our patients and us."

Natal's desire to help others extends beyond her responsibilities at the center. "I joined NAHQ because working with my peers in healthcare quality can make a difference on a more global scale," she says.

"Working with the Quality Review and Accountability Work Group to create advanced and master competencies for HQPs opened my eyes to the many different layers of healthcare quality," she says. "Collaborating with people with different skill sets from a variety of organizations across the continuum of care, I started to peel those layers back and realize just how many career opportunities and skill sets there are within the healthcare quality profession."

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