

Debora Sawyer, MD

Regional Medical Director,
Outpatient Quality and External Report
KP Santa Clara

Debora Sawyer, MD, has an authentic way of inspiring change by sharing personal stories. She often invokes the story of her mother, who died of lung cancer at age 53, when emphasizing the importance of meeting patients where they are. Her mother tried to quit smoking many times, but was never able to get time off from work to attend stop-smoking classes, which were offered only during the day.

It's this story that sparked the creation of the 50,000 Quitters campaign, which Dr. Sawyer oversees. By identifying and connecting smokers to accessible medication, coaching, and counseling, Kaiser Permanente Northern California has helped more than 200,000 patients to stop smoking.

Dr. Sawyer's strategic mindset for performance improvement, alongside quality leaders from across the region, has driven a 52% reduction in colon cancer deaths in KP Northern California over the past 10 years. This led to the transformation our colorectal cancer screening practices.

Through these efforts and more, she's successfully partnered with many local quality leaders, physicians and staffs to propel The Permanente Medical Group in its 14-year journey to become a national leader in quality of care.

To create change, Dr. Sawyer brings together physicians and staff to identify how The Permanente Medical Group can optimize patient care. She has empowered these teams to design, test, and improve on ideas to find solutions. "Systems designed with high reliability make the right action easy to do, all while improving and saving lives," she says.



Dr. Sawyer has made our quality work about saving lives so we find more joy and meaning in practicing medicine. She is a master at articulating “the why” before showing “the how.”

—Yi-Fen Irene Chen, MD,
associate executive director,
The Permanente Medical Group