

ChartConnect Community-Based Electronic Medical Records

case study

The Yakima HealthCare Community

There was a time when doctors and hospital staff in the Yakima Valley had to rely on paper files to keep track of their patients' medications and case histories. Retrieving this data in emergency situations or for something as simple as a prescription refill was time consuming, costly and inefficient. However, now all of that has changed in Yakima. In fact, over 70% of Yakima providers (241 providers out of 300) are now using a common online electronic medical records application to electronically share administrative and clinical information between providers.

The easy-to-use online application is provided by ChartConnect, and the ability to share pertinent information is due to ChartConnect's electronic interfaces with the two area hospitals, Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital and Yakima Regional Health Center; all four national and regional labs operating in the area; Valley Imaging Partners; Medical Center Pathology; and many transcription services, practice management systems and other healthcare partners.

The benefits of connecting the community to share information electronically are many, eliminating labor associated with handling and scanning paper, reducing errors due to mismatching information to the wrong patient and speeding the delivery of critical information. Providers receive reports seconds after they are created—even during nights and weekends. To further cut paperwork, time and frustration, clinics can send and receive referrals, consults and other patient information to each other electronically. A HIPAA-compliant release of information record is maintained automatically by the system, an aspect of the application users rave about.

Although the system now in place in Yakima can best be described as a Regional Health Information Network (or RHIN), ChartConnect began development of their community-based approach long before RHIN and RHIO (Regional Health Information Organization) became popular buzz-words, back when CHINs (Community Health Information Networks) first came to light, then disappeared because the technology just wasn't ready.

The success of the network is due to the fact that a critical mass of physicians in the area signed on to use ChartConnect. For the data-providers (hospitals, labs, etc) in the area, the fact that they could reach almost all the physicians



ChartConnect, Inc. provides a comprehensive electronic medical record for physician practices and hospitals nationwide, offering a range of products to help providers connect with their healthcare community to streamline workflow and increase efficiency. For more information, visit www.chartconnect.com.

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they needed to reach helped encourage them to build interfaces to ChartConnect to provide their data to physicians. In May of 2004, after a substantial number of providers were using ChartConnect and several labs were interfaced, Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital (Memorial) joined. Shortly thereafter, Yakima Regional Health Center joined as well. This allowed both hospitals to send ADT, lab results, radiology reports and transcribed reports electronically to ChartConnect for delivery to ChartConnect users in the Yakima Valley. With these additions, even more area physicians, recognized the time savings and began using ChartConnect's online application in their offices.

They started out just providing information to area physicians through ChartConnect, but soon the hospitals realized that they could access information themselves by using the online application. Once the vast majority of Yakima physicians and health care providers were using ChartConnect as their EMR, hospital emergency room providers, hospitalists, pharmacists and nurses became convinced of the benefits and value of immediate access to so much outpatient data and began using ChartConnect in the hospital. They now benefit from a wealth of online chart information just like the physician clinics in the area.

“The information circle is now complete,” according to Jim Aberle, Chief Operations Officer for Memorial. “Memorial provides inpatient HL7 reports to ChartConnect provider-offices and now Memorial has access to the outpatient reports. This is how medicine should work.”

Aberle reports that by using the ChartConnect's “Permissions” system, Memorial users can quickly access outpatient charts, even from multiple provider offices, saving valuable time. Besides the obvious savings of hours per shift tracking down patient history, problem lists, medications and allergies, the instant access means faster treatment for critical patients with less risk of treatment complications such as drug interactions. Yakima physicians and hospital staff are together realizing the advantages of electronic access and sharing of patient information; and doing away with the old method of paper records and reports which are often misplaced, unavailable or illegible.

Hospitals now have crucial information that could save lives in emergency situations. When a patient presents to most hospitals, the hospital-based patient record available for review amounts to less than 10 or 20 percent of the patient's total history – the balance is in various primary and specialty clinics throughout the community. This makes treating the patient difficult and dangerous without spending time trying to research this other 80 percent. Using ChartConnect's Permission system, hospital providers now have instant access to these outpatient records. The most current labs, radiology, pathology, medications, allergies problems lists, vitals, chart notes, flow sheets and other clinical information gives hospital personnel everything they need to safely begin emergency treatment.

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“We used to spend 10-40 minutes per patient calling doctors and pharmacies for patient information, waiting for return-calls, taking handwritten notes or waiting for faxes,” said Alan Collinsworth, Emergency Department Director for Memorial Hospital. “Nights and weekends were especially frustrating and we often came up empty handed. Now we just make a quick search of ChartConnect to get what we need in seconds.”

Physicians now have complete information on their patients for better follow-up care. ResultManager and ChartConnect EMR allow providers to electronically receive lab results, radiology reports, ADT messages and face sheets, and transcribed reports. Providers can review these reports, forward them to their front desk to notify and/or schedule the patients and even forward the report to other providers in the form of a referral or consult report, along with other chart components. Clinics and providers are notified when one of their patients has been admitted to the hospital or visits the emergency room so they can schedule patient follow-up care. ChartConnect also provides a messaging and routing system for medical staff and providers.

When a patient is admitted to a hospital in Yakima, it is now far simpler for the patient’s primary care physician to track their patient’s progress. When hospital staff uses ChartConnect to view a patient chart, the provider-of-record for the chart is instantly notified in their ChartConnect message Inbox of who accessed the chart and when. This allows the physician to schedule a follow-up appointment after the patient has been discharged from the hospital. Statistics indicate that 85% of hospital patients do not get the follow-up care prescribed-mostly because nobody called them to schedule it. In Yakima, they are solving this problem.



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