

Community Based Electronic Medical Records

The Tri-Cities HealthCare Community

case study

Despite widespread interest in electronic medical records and a general recognition of the high cost of paper records, physicians across the country historically have been reluctant to adopt EMRs (electronic medical records) in their practices. Many who have experimented with EMRs have found adopting a new work method daunting, and found traditional EMRs expensive, with slim returns – especially considering the cost of scanning information into the EMR.

However, now all of that is starting to change. In fact, not only one physician practice, but an entire healthcare community in Central Washington has begun using common online applications to electronically share administrative and clinical information between providers. Although not all of the physician practices have implemented a full EMR system, they are a step closer. They are now able to receive, act on, and manage a patient-centric record of results, reports, referrals and consults electronically for a fraction of the cost normally associated with building a community-wide health information network.

Over the last two years, healthcare organizations in The Tri-Cities – Richland, Kennewick and Pasco, Washington – have banded together to realize the community-wide benefits of sharing information electronically. Instead of implementing separate solutions, they chose ChartConnect's ResultManager, which gives the 123 participating providers in the Tri-Cities access to all of the local healthcare information they need in one place, with interfaces with a local hospital; six laboratories – hospital-based, regional and national; two radiology groups; and 89 area pharmacies.

ResultManager allows 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.

Kadlec Medical Center, a leading hospital in the Tri-Cities, spearheaded the move to electronic medical records by sponsoring ChartConnect ResultManager for their staff and community providers. "Part of our successful growth as a



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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regional medical center can be traced to making it easier for providers to practice at Kadlec than elsewhere,” said Rand Wortman, Kadlec CEO. “ChartConnect is one of the important pieces allowing Kadlec to accomplish this.”

Kadlec Medical Center has long been a proponent of electronic automation. Believing that electronic medical records were the wave of the future, in 1998 the hospital started to drive adoption of hospital-based delivery and viewing systems. After an evolution of four different versions from two different vendors, Kadlec has been twice as successful as the national average with approximately 10% of Kadlec’s staff providers using these applications. However, the majority of providers were reluctant to use the applications because they could only receive results for Kadlec Medical Center, which represented only a part of their business.

In October of 2002, Kadlec signed on with ChartConnect, and after little more than a year, 123 of the 250 Tri-Cities providers are now using the online application, over 85% of which are Kadlec providers. The difference? Unlike the previous efforts, ChartConnect delivers results from other community labs, radiology groups, transcriptionists and other hospitals in the community, giving participating providers a complete view of the patient report history rather than a limited view from just one facility. Physicians can use the result viewing capabilities alone or seamlessly upgrade into a full EMR.

For Kadlec Medical Center the successful implementation highlighted ChartConnect’s unique advantage over other EMRs, “ChartConnect is delivering what others didn’t – a product that a significant number of providers are actually using,” said David Roach, Kadlec Medical Center COO.

The addition of two major independent laboratories, Interpath Laboratories and Tri-Cities laboratories, further increased provider interest in ChartConnect. These laboratories – recognizing the benefits of working with just one vendor to reach a critical mass of area physicians – not only created interfaces with ChartConnect to make their data available, but actively sponsored ChartConnect licenses for area physicians and their staff. Wanting to provide faster and more reliable delivery of orders and results, Interpath Laboratories has extended the service to more than 75 providers, and Tri-Cities Laboratory works with more than 150 providers that are now using ChartConnect. In response to their offer, providers throughout Eastern Washington and Northeast Oregon are now using ChartConnect.

“We wanted to provide referring doctors with electronic access to their reports rather than having to fax or send hard copies,” said Lynn Ball, administrator at Tri-Cities Radiology. Paul Christensen, general manager of Tri-Cities Laboratories agreed, “The more we can eliminate paper, the more efficient it gets. With ChartConnect, we don’t have to print a piece of paper and deliver it, which is

the main benefit.”

Both Tri-Cities Laboratories and Interpath Laboratories were most impressed by the number of providers using ChartConnect. “ChartConnect has been very successful in getting offices to actually use the technology,” said Paul Christensen, general manager of Tri-Cities Laboratories. Tom Kennedy, Interpath’s president, agreed, “We were pleasantly surprised at how fast ChartConnect EMR was being adopted by so many of our clients. That made it easy to recommend ResultManager for our clients who want electronic results, but aren’t quite ready for the full EMR. This upgrade benefit was a major factor in our decision.”

For Tri-Cities providers, the advantages of electronic access and sharing of patient information over the old method of paper records and reports which are often misplaced, unavailable or illegible, are becoming increasingly clear. With ChartConnect ResultManager, they are realizing faster delivery and handling of lab, radiology and transcribed reports at greatly reduced cost. The use of ChartConnect has reduced the need for calls from clinics for additional copies of reports, and has resulted in almost instant referrals and consult-reports between referring and consulting providers. Providers report time-savings and an increase in productivity since adopting ChartConnect, as patient charts do not need to be located and pulled each time reports or transactions need to be added. The convenience of an online system is significant for busy physicians and clinic staff. With ChartConnect’s online application, they now have complete access to their clinical EMR functions from within their clinic, the hospital and even from home.

Some Tri-Cities physicians have upgraded from ResultManager to the full ChartConnect EMR. EMR users have access to additional features including a complete medication/refill/allergy system, problem lists, social/family/surgical and diagnostic procedure histories, templated encounters and integration with voice recognition, macros and handwriting recognition. Users report not only significant cost savings, but a reduction in stress levels and the ability to enjoy the practice of medicine again.

David Strutz is the Director of Mid-Columbia Medical Associates, a Nephrology and Infection Disease clinic in Kennewick, Washington. Strutz indicated one of the major process issues at their clinic was the extra time it took to pull non-scheduled patient charts to attach reports or send consultation reports. The reports would need to be approved, faxed and then the charts were re-filed. This occurred approximated 35 times per day at \$3.87 per pull or \$135.45 per day per provider. “We were at a point where we either had to hire another FTE or make the leap into the world of EMR. We took the leap - saving the FTE and implementing a better process,” said Strutz. “With the ChartConnect EMR, we received improved processes, time savings, budget savings, improved customer service, better organized medical records and a staff with less stress. Not only did we not have to add the additional staff position, we were able to add a fifth provider while keeping the same support staff.”

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Dr. Gene Wong, a family practice provider in Richland, Washington started with an EMR through another company in 1998. But in 2002, Dr. Wong switched to ChartConnect because it offered additional features that were not available with the EMR he had been using. In particular, ChartConnect provided the interfaced labs, radiology reports and other interfaced information his (and other) EMR products offered but never produced. When asked what ChartConnect has done for his office Wong said, "Because of the way ChartConnect automatically interfaces test results into our workflow, we have been able to add an additional provider without any additional support staff and we are more in control of our patient information than ever. ChartConnect also allows me to access patient information from the hospital or my home when I am on call."

In other markets, national statistics show less than stellar adoption and retention rates for EMRs (40 to 50 percent of providers have tried EMRs, while only an estimated 4 to 7 percent are actually using EMRs). However, ChartConnect has been adopted by over 40 percent of Tri-Cities providers within the first year and records show every group that has started with ChartConnect EMR is still using the product—a 100 percent retention rate.

So what's next for the Tri-Cities? It is estimated that 200 of the 250 community providers will be using ChartConnect by the end of the end of 2005. Also, a new "facility login" is ready for implementation in Kadlec's emergency department which will allow emergency room physicians to quickly access the clinical records of various clinics that choose to allow emergency department access to their patient charts. It is expected that the new feature will save time, money and possibly even lives as emergency department physicians and staff will not have to waste critical time calling clinic providers out of a patient encounter (or out of bed at night) to get needed medication lists, allergies, problem lists and other patient history items.



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