

St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center Transforms Operations and Enhances Patient Care

At a Glance

Organization

St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center, Syracuse, N.Y.

- 431-bed hospital
- Inpatient visits: 26,000
- Outpatient visits: 400,000

Solution Spotlight

- Horizon Patient Folder
- Horizon^{WP} Physician Portal

Critical Issues

- Poor access to patient information
- High chart delinquency rates
- Lost revenue from untimely abstracts

Results

- Reduced net write-offs by \$1 million
- Reduced DNFB days from nine to five
- Gained \$2.9 million in one-time reduction in A/R days
- Reduced operating expenses by more than \$350,000
- Reduced chart deficiency rate from 37% to 2%

Profile

Faced with a costly “paper disaster,” St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center (St. Joseph's) brought a mountain of paper under control with document imaging technology. By converting paper charts to electronic files, the provider not only increased medical and nonmedical staff efficiency and achieved significant savings, but also enhanced patient care.

Challenges

Each year, St. Joseph's averages more than 26,000 inpatient and 400,000 outpatient visits, which produce thousands of paper charts. Stored in cramped spaces, these records were frequently incomplete or lost, making it difficult to bill for services. In addition, physicians could not locate information on patients in a timely manner, leading to strained relationships.

“Physician chart deficiency rates approached 100% when I first arrived,” says Health Information Management (HIM) Director Sharon Goettel, who reduced the deficiency rate to 37% in her first two years. “There were more than 8,500 records sitting in a room that physicians needed to complete.”

To complete a chart, clinicians had to visit the chart room. When they

arrived, the staff was often unable to locate the chart, which might be with another department or physician. In addition, various departments throughout the hospital created “shadow” charts to give medical staff quick access to vital patient information.

Answers

St. Joseph's already used McKesson's Horizon Patient Folder™ document imaging solution in its Emergency Department. Management saw the value of expanding its use throughout the hospital to electronically capture, index, retrieve and manage all patient records.

In addition, medical staff used the Horizon^{WP} Physician Portal solution. Their positive experience with this Web gateway, which provides secure anytime, anywhere access to vital patient information, helped pave the way for physician adoption of technology.

A survey of medical staff revealed that electronic access to patient records was among their top three needs. However, IT staff was concerned that transforming to a total electronic environment might initially hinder access to patient records by physicians. To ensure a flawless launch, the hospital created a team of dedicated resources focused on the implementation details and training needs of physicians.

Case Study

“Horizon Patient Folder is a key foundational component of our overall strategy. It has allowed us to meet our two primary goals of enhancing operational efficiencies and supporting physicians by making it easier for them to practice.”

Chuck Fennell

**Chief Information Officer
St. Joseph's Hospital**

Health Center

McKesson Provider Technologies

5995 Windward Parkway
Alpharetta, GA 30005

<http://www.mckesson.com>
1.800.981.8601

Results

With seamless access to patient records, St. Joseph's clinicians can now easily access, sign and complete charts with Horizon Patient Folder. As a result, chart deficiency rates fell from 37% to 2%. In addition, preadmission testing staff now performs far fewer unnecessary tests on readmitted patients.

“Horizon Patient Folder provides much more than an electronic database — the solution allows us to manage workflow, assign work queues and issue access privileges,” explains Goettel. “Coupled with the portal, multiple users now have simultaneous access to patient records throughout the hospital.”

The document imaging implementation has also revolutionized patient records management and created significant savings. The hospital saw immediate cost savings and achieved payback on the initial investment in just over 13 months, realizing a 102% rate of return.

In addition, St. Joseph's reduced staff by seven full-time equivalents (FTEs), saving more than \$250,000 annually. The provider can also better measure and regulate employee productivity through audit trails.

The use of electronic records has also minimized or eliminated other HIM department operating

expenses, such as filing supplies and microfilm/microfiche costs, saving more than \$100,000 annually. Additionally, more than 500 square feet of on-site storage space was freed for more productive purposes.

The hospital also realizes a year-over-year reduction of almost \$1 million in pre-receivable adjustments, or income not previously realized for services performed due to incomplete, late or missing documentation.

With immediate documentation available to coding and billing staff, days not final billed (DNFB) in medical records dropped from nine days to five. This acceleration in collections also resulted in a one-time benefit of \$2.9 million for the hospital.

“Horizon Patient Folder is a key foundational component of our overall strategy,” says Chuck Fennell, chief information officer. “It has allowed us to meet our two primary goals of enhancing operational efficiencies and supporting physicians by making it easier for them to practice.”

Dr. Ronald Greenberg, a hospitalist with St. Joseph's, agrees. “Horizon Patient Folder solves the 'black hole' of trying to find important patient information,” he says. “And access to vital information means being able to make more informed patient care decisions.”

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