

Making IT Meaningful: Supporting New Standards of Care for Rural and Community Hospitals

BY CAROLYN JONES

Guiding a hospital into the information age is never easy, but it's even less so when the hospital is in a remote or rural area. The information technology solutions used in larger medical centers don't mold with the workflow of community hospitals. Moreover, smaller facilities lack the financial and human resources of their urban counterparts. This makes implementation of new technology costly and adoption a challenge to sustain.

Nevertheless, the rewards of connectivity are clear, and Ted Matthews, chief executive officer of Eastland Memorial Hospital, knows this because he's seen it. In his previous role as CEO of Anson General Hospital, he and three other rural Texas hospital administrators collaborated on a regional health information organization to adopt an electronic health record. The EHR system was integrated with billing, laboratory, pharmacy and radiology systems across the four hospitals, creating a continuum of care for patients in that region.

"As patients travelled between the emergency room facilities at our different hospitals, I could see the benefits of sharing clinical information about them," Matthews said. "I wanted that for Eastland when I joined."

In December 2010 Matthews looked for an IT solution for EMH, a 52-bed community facility 100 miles west of Dallas. After considering a number of vendors, he chose Prognosis Health Information Systems. Matthews knew this vendor would deliver the goods because it had done so before. Prognosis had implemented its ChartAccess® comprehensive EHR at Anson General Hospital, which allowed the RHIO, now administered by Rick DeFoore, FACHE, chief executive officer of Stamford Memorial Hospital, to achieve meaningful use within months of go-live.

Reaping the Financial Benefits

Matthews also knew that Prognosis offered solutions attractive to rural hospitals like EMH. All financial and clinical products are delivered on a Web-native platform, which means facilities only need Internet access to log on to the system. The software can be personalized to each user. Moreover, Prognosis provides on-site and remote technical support, a big sell for Matthews given the hospital's small staff. In addition, Prognosis offers a predictable 120-day implementation path as well as fixed fees and upfront costs.



"This is important for clients," said Prognosis CEO Ramsey Evans, "because they need to know they won't be nickel-and-dimed as they go along."

EMH chose to implement both financial and clinical products, meaning Matthews opted for Prognosis' specialty: the full-scale enterprise solution. However, the hospital chose not to implement with a "big bang" for fear of disrupting business. Instead, Prognosis phased each product in gradually, starting with the FinancialAccess™ tool in February 2011 and culminating in complete clinical integration of the ChartAccess, ChartNotes™ and Meaningful Use Scorecard™ tools by June.

"It was a steep learning curve for our staff. Implementation was a sprint," said Matthews. "It required total commitment and focus from every employee as well as hospital trustees."

That focus paid off. By September 2011, EMH successfully met meaningful use and was able to draw down significant incentive payments. In November 2012, it harvested the financial rewards again. Taking EMH into the information age was a significant capital investment, but Matthews reports that the incentive payments the hospital earned covered the cost of initial implementation.

Revolutionizing Operations

So what does business look like on the other side of a big IT adoption? Not surprisingly, it has revolutionized operations.

“When you start using electronic medical records, you see all the inconsistencies and inefficiencies of what you’d done before,” said Matthews. “It changes your workflow in a way that improves continuity of care and makes service better for your patients.”

Previously, for example, order forms were physically carried to individual departments, patients filled out reams of duplicate paperwork, and clinicians flipped through charts or even headed to the file room to access patient information. Now this data is shared seamlessly and in real time. Clinicians can access important information about their patients without having to leave their side. At discharge, patients can take their clinical history home with them on a CD. Also, ChartAccess and its Meaningful Use Scorecard alert clinicians to quality measures that comprise meaningful use attestation. This makes care better and safer for patients.

“Our ChartNotes application takes documentation to a whole new level,” said Melanie Pita, chief product officer at Prognosis, noting that clients have called it a “game changer.”

Prognosis’ mission is to transition the clinical aspect of patient care to a 100 percent paperless system. EMH is accomplishing this with tools like computerized order entry, electronic laboratory results and paperless bedside documentation.

Given that accounting efficiency is the lifeblood of any hospital, the money side matters, too. Thanks to Prognosis’ financial application, FinancialAccess, EMH’s financial benchmarks have never looked better. The financial system includes billing, claims processing, payroll and scheduling and is fully integrated with ChartAccess. Now accurate coding means more accurate charges.

Most hospitals in Texas are somewhere on the path to implementing EHRs. Financial incentives from the federal government give these initiatives a tailwind. However, as Heather McNabb, the EHR consultant responsible for implementation at EMH, said, “We don’t want to just meet the national benchmarks. We want to surpass them. Currently, our benchmark scores far exceed the meaningful use requirements. We accomplish this task by working as a hospital team with Prognosis to monitor these measures daily.”

Indeed, enterprise solutions like those offered by Prognosis enable hospitals to meet meaningful use criteria, but they allow them to do so much more, too: to work smarter, to reduce expenses, and to improve quality and patient safety.

EMH is so convinced of the benefits of health IT that it’s a beta test site for Prognosis’ newest clinical product, the ED Whiteboard.™ Matthews is happy to see his hospital at the forefront of the IT revolution and thrilled with how the new digital culture is setting in.

“A new nurse told me recently that she’d only used electronic charts,” he said. “I smiled when I heard that. It’s remarkable to see that the new standard of care is already here.” *

Prognosis Health Information Systems

Prognosis Health Information Systems provides an enterprise solution, including electronic health record and financial systems, to rural and community hospitals. Prognosis offers a predictable path, including a guaranteed 120-day go-live schedule and fixed-fee implementation with one upfront cost. The Texas-based company has helped 100 percent of its eligible clients achieve Stage 1 of meaningful use. In addition, Prognosis has helped lower accounts receivable days by more than 50 percent. Prognosis can guide hospitals down the road ahead, keeping the end goal in mind: providing the best possible care.



Contact:

Bruce Thigpen
770/335-9811
bthigpen@prognosisishis.com
www.prognosisishis.com