

Physicians Medical Group of Santa Cruz County Drives EHR Adoption with Connectivity to a Health Information Exchange

At a Glance

Organization

Physicians Medical Group of Santa Cruz County Santa Cruz, Calif.

- IPA with 300 providers and 77 practices
- Provides primary care and specialty service
- 250,000 patients generating 600,000 encounters per year

Solution Spotlight

- HIE interface from Practice Partner® to Elysium® Exchange
- Practice Partner® Appointment Scheduler
- Practice Partner® Medical Billing
- Practice Partner® Order Entry
- Practice Partner® Patient Records

Critical Issues

- Provide connectivity from Practice Partner EHR to HIE
- Consolidate clinical data from multiple sources into a single feed into the EHR

Results

- Successful deployment of an HIE interface
- Time for interface deployment reduced by 85% when compared to point-to-point interfaces
- Scanning of paper-based documents reduced by 90%

Physicians Medical Group of Santa Cruz County (PMG) is a 300-physician independent practice association (IPA) that serves the coastal community of Santa Cruz County, Calif. PMG developed a robust health information exchange (HIE) as part of its vision of creating an interconnected medical community.

Since an HIE aggregates data from multiple clinical sources, the IPA realized it could be an effective tool for simplifying interfaces to ambulatory electronic health records (EHRs). PMG developed an interface that aggregates data from radiology centers, hospitals, clinical reference labs, transcription services and other sources into a single data feed and deposits that information into the EHR. The streamlined data exchange system has improved patient care and efficiency for PMG's EHR-based providers and has strongly supported its goal to deploy the EHR throughout the IPA.

Challenges

For PMG, the concept of a HIE was considered more than 12 years ago. "We felt that moving data electronically between doctors and facilities was both safer and more effective than traditional paper, phone and fax methods. We were

also convinced that it would help support higher quality care," recalls Robert Weber, M.D., PMG board member and primary care physician.

PMG was also committed to an ambulatory EHR. "A HIE and an EHR work in tandem," notes Bill Beighe, chief information officer, PMG. "The HIE aggregates and delivers patient information from disparate sources, and the EHR provides point-of-care documentation and clinical management functions. Both are critical to patient care."

Answers

After extensive due diligence, PMG decided to adopt the Elysium® Exchange from Axolotl for its HIE and the Practice Partner® system of integrated EHR and practice management applications from McKesson.

Using Elysium Exchange as an IT backbone, PMG established interfaces to the primary sources of clinical data within its community, including two local hospitals (for labs, radiology, pathology and inpatient transcription), three outpatient radiology centers, three clinical reference labs and more than six transcription services for outpatient facilities. While these interfaces supported the overall goal of quicker provider access to data, they also supported PMG's vision of EHR connectivity.

Case Study

"The beauty of Practice Partner is its ability to map data into the right section of the chart, which makes it much easier for providers to locate information."

Bill Beighe

*Chief Information Officer
Physicians Medical Group
of Santa Cruz County*

"We wanted to be able to direct a single feed containing data from multiple sources into the EHR as opposed to supporting multiple point-to-point interfaces," says Beighe. "This approach would give our EHR users the comprehensive data they need without burdening our IT staff."

This strategy has also supported PMG's deployment of Practice Partner across the IPA. "The connectivity of Practice Partner to Elysium has made the EHR that much more powerful — as well as easier for providers to deploy," says Beighe. "When you combine that with our hosted model, we have really streamlined the process for taking advantage of the EHR." The hosted model allows PMG providers to access Practice Partner over the Web, eliminating the need for a local database server.

Results

Practice Partner proved to be the ideal choice. Working with McKesson and Axolotl technical staff, PMG realized its goal of a "single-feed" interface. The Practice Partner-HIE interface delivers hospital information and data from radiology and clinical reference labs and transcription services. Both text reports (i.e., discharge summaries) and granular data such as individual lab results are supported.

"The beauty of Practice Partner is its ability to map data into the right section of the chart, which makes it much easier for providers to locate information," relays Beighe.

Beighe is also impressed by the ability of Practice Partner to incorporate incoming data into the care process. "When a Practice Partner user receives an incoming lab result or test result through the interface, such as HgbA1c or a mammogram, the system automatically updates the health maintenance section of the patient's chart, which keeps the chart up-to-date and eliminates manual entry."

The response from the providers has been positive. "All the patient information from Elysium flows directly into Practice Partner. You know exactly what is going on, and don't have to worry about lost paper," says Dr. Thanh Vu, an internist.

The word is spreading to providers who have not yet deployed EHRs. "Our backlog of EHR projects is rapidly increasing — there is a lot of excitement in the community," notes Beighe.

McKesson Provider Technologies

5995 Windward Parkway
Alpharetta, GA 30005

[http://www.mckesson.com/
practicepartner](http://www.mckesson.com/practicepartner)
1.800.770.7674

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