Quality Improvement Goal



**Robyn Thomas**

**Director of Information Technology**

**Community Action Health Clinic**

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**Darrell Adams, DO**

**Obstetrician & Gynecologist**

To achieve Meaningful Use (MU) of the Electronic Health Record (EHR) and improve care coordination.

Overview

The Community Action Health Clinic is a rural health clinic in Portsmouth, Ohio providing primary care and obstetrics and gynecological (OB-GYN) services. It houses the Women Infants and Children (WIC) program, which provides medical and social services to low-income women who are pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding.

The health clinic staff consists of one full-time nurse practitioner, four nurses, seven general staff members, and one part-time general medical physician. The clinic also relies on four OB-GYNs in the county to rotate on a monthly basis. The OB-GYNs volunteer their time to see patients and train medical residents at the Community Action Health Clinic. These physicians also operate their own private practices throughout the county. They deliver about 1,200 babies per year and have full surgical and medical patient schedules.

Meaningful Use Attestation

The Community Action Health Clinic’s general medical physician and nurse practitioner have achieved Stage 1 Meaningful Use for their first year and will be attesting for their second year of Stage 1 soon. Most of the OB-GYNs have also achieved Meaningful Use in their own private practices.

Robyn Thomas, Director of Information Technology at the Community Action Health Clinic and Dr. Darrell Adams intend to pursue Stage 2 in the future. The health clinic has adopted a server-based installation of Allscripts. In his private practice, Dr. Adams has adopted an OB-GYN specific, cloud-based software called DigiChart, now Artemis. Both of those EHR vendors report that they are going through the process of obtaining 2014 Edition Certification and plan to release updates later this year.

## Adopting Electronic Health Records

Dr. Darrell Adams: “I don’t let technology slow me down. It costs less than my time and I don’t have to wrestle with paper. Electronic is the way to go for me. It saves me time and money.”

Robyn Thomas started working at Community Action Health Clinic in 1999. Her professional background in information technology as a programmer and software developer was leveraged to build a home-grown system for scheduling appointments and collecting data for grant and state reporting requirements. Once the EHR Incentive Program began, Robyn was instrumental in helping the health clinic migrate from the home grown system to a certified EHR system. Her ability to solve problems and implement innovative solutions does not go unnoticed by those associated with the health clinic.

Dr. Adams is an advocate for the use of electronic systems. As an early adopter, he has been using EHRs for seven years and is on his third EHR system. When Dr. Adams took over his practice seven years ago, he had almost 20,000 paper charts. The paper charts were migrated into an EHR system, which at the time was not OB-GYN specific. Dr. Adams believes he has found the right system for his practice and says his cloud-based EHR provides the flexibility and freedom needed for his private practice. When Dr. Adams is not in his office, he takes his computer with him so that he can connect to the internet and securely access all of his patient’s charts and lab results.

Patients are intrigued by the technology and it does not interfere with the services they receive at the health clinic. It’s general practice for OB-GYNs to have a nurse or medical assistant, known as chaperones, present during pelvic exams. Dr. Adams leverages his chaperone as a scribe to enter data during the visit, so he is able to focus on having a personal, face-to-face interaction with each patient. Dr. Adams reviews the information in the EHR and each patient walks out of the clinic with a copy of their clinical summary.

Care Coordination

Providers in the Portsmouth, Ohio area have been able to achieve an extraordinary level of care coordination using health information technology. They have been able to use the CliniSync HIE connection and software, provided at no cost by the Ohio Health Information Partnership, to communicate across facilities in ways that are unexpected. According to Dan Paoletti, CEO of the Ohio Health Information Partnership, “What’s remarkable about the Portsmouth area, a rural part of the state with great hospitals and great providers, is that they have done a phenomenal job with limited resources. When we came along offering all of this technology at a price they wouldn’t otherwise be able to afford, not only did they embrace it, but they made it their own. They’re our shining light. We’ve taken providers from urban areas down there to show them what they’re doing. The Portsmouth providers just needed an opportunity and the technology and they thought about all these cool things they could do.”

Managed by the Ohio Health Information Partnership, CliniSync is the first statewide health information exchange that provides connectivity and software to help health care providers communicate through encrypted email, referral management, and delivery of results and reports. CliniSync does not charge providers for the HIE software, implementation or interfaces. Most of CliniSync’s revenue comes from maintenance fees charged to the over 140 hospitals connected to the HIE across the state.

Robyn Thomas admits that the catalyst for adoption was the free technology offered by CliniSync. In their particular economic situation the health clinic is always looking for any mechanism to improve care. The Community Action Health Clinic was able to make the CliniSync referral tracking tool work for their specific patient population by implementing it in a unique way. Previously, they were faxing patient records over to the hospital. The process was very inefficient and costly. Robyn got the hospital to use the CliniSync technology. Now, they use the system to create a mirror image of the patient record at the hospital for their prenatal patients. They can electronically track and verify that the records were sent and the hospital can log into the existing referral to see the latest information when the patients go to the hospital to deliver their babies.

After Dr. Adams saw how successfully the health clinic and hospital were exchanging health information, he reached out to other providers in the area and encouraged them to connect with the HIE for referral tracking and exchange of lab results.

The CliniSync software enables providers to securely exchange clinical information and facilitate access of electronic clinical data through the HIE. Dr. Adams and Robyn say that the key was that CliniSync’s plan made sense and their timing was good. The providers were all looking for a way to connect with one another and CliniSync made it easy to do.

Challenges

Both the Community Action Health Clinic and Dr. Adams experienced some issues before selecting the right EHR system. The health clinic purchased a system and delayed go-live due to several unresolved problems. The Ohio Health Information Partnership encouraged them to look at other EHR systems. After talking with other EHR vendors, the health clinic found another EHR to be a more suitable solution and made a bold move to pull the plug and switch EHRs. Dr. Adam’s first EHR was for a general practice. He tweaked it for his OB-GYN practice, but found it cumbersome. He didn’t use his second EHR for very long before switching to an OB-GYN specific EHR that he finds easy to use.

Looking forward to Stage 2 of Meaningful Use, Dr. Adams and Robyn are concerned about how they will handle the influx of calls they expect to get from patients after they implement the patient portal requirements. When patients are able to see, but not interpret their lab results, that will put extra demand on the staff and doctors to respond to patient inquires. In a rural clinic and private practice, there are financial constraints that will not allow for additional resources. However, Robyn optimistically says, “That lends itself to us thinking outside the box. If you have all the money in the world and you can just hire another staff person, it’s not a big deal. You just do it and move on. When you’re under some financial constraint, health clinics and practices like Dr. Adams’ practice will need to start innovating and using the tools that someone else gives us for free initially and use it in another way. Just like we did with CliniSync.”

Lessons Learned

Robyn Thomas and Dr. Adams suggest the following for providers who are planning to implement health information technology:

* Choose your EHR wisely because switching is painful.
* Consider doing a phased-in implementation approach, which will allow users to ease into using the full capability of the system.
* Schedule regular opportunities for ongoing training and peer reviews because it helps users learn from each other.
* Consider selecting a cloud vendor, especially for private practices without IT staff.

Next Steps

Community Action Health Clinic and Dr. Adams will continue to pursue Meaningful Use attestation for future stages and leverage technology to improve workflow and patient care coordination.

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