

Alliance of Chicago Community Health Services, LLC

Centricity Practice Solution and the GE Medical Quality Improvement Consortium help community health organizations positively impact productivity and quality of care



“Since our Centers deployed Centricity Practice Solution, we have seen greater efficiency, enabling them to redeploy staff clerical activities to more direct patient services. This has led to growth in the volume of patients being seen, with volumes rising as much as six percent at some sites without an increase in staff FTE.”

Fred Rachman, M.D.
Chief Executive Officer

*Alliance of Chicago
Community Health Services*

Overview

Practice Type

Community Health Centers (CHCs) provide a wide range of services to uninsured and under-served patients in rural and inner city environments, including comprehensive primary care, dental, mental health, social services, and health education.

Organization Overview

Alliance of Chicago Community Health Services is an Illinois-based limited liability corporation founded by four CHCs as a strategy through which participating independent not-for-profit healthcare organizations can benefit from a shared infrastructure without compromising autonomy.

“The Alliance is a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)-funded, Health Center Controlled Network designed to help support the ability of the individual community health centers to provide quality healthcare to the communities they serve,” states Dr. Fred Rachman, CEO of the Alliance of Chicago. “Our mission is about improving access to care, improving the quality of the care we provide, and also improving the efficiency and economy in the way we provide those services.” As a significant part of its focus on clinical quality and efficiency, the Alliance centrally hosts and manages Healthcare Information Technology (HIT) systems for its four Chicago-based CHCs and a growing number of CHCs and other Safety Net healthcare organizations across the U.S.

The Challenge

For CHCs, the increasing complexity of healthcare in general is further complicated by the challenges of coordination across diverse support systems used by providers in multiple disciplines and the challenge of addressing patient needs with limited resources. Like all primary healthcare providers, Alliance clinical staff must also integrate continuously evolving patient, population, and knowledge based information in order to provide quality care.

To support the Health Centers in meeting these challenges, the Alliance planned to centrally host a HIT solution – both the electronic medical record (EMR) and practice management components – for all of its participating CHCs.

As the organization evaluated solutions, the Alliance was focused on finding technology that would allow them to enhance the quality of care and patient safety, increase capacity, and reduce costs. In addition, the Alliance looked for a solution that would help them increase efficiency and productivity, and allowed for the exchange of clinical data smoothly with other electronic health databases. Most importantly, the Alliance was looking for a tool to help the organization incorporate evidence-based recommendations into practice. For the primary care ambulatory sites throughout the Alliance, the capability to provide data and reporting to support the care model was vital.

Company profile

- Founded in 1997
- Organization providing centralized information technology services for over 20 Community Health Centers (CHCs) across the U.S.
- Alliance Providers at 4 founding members: 44 physicians, 28 nurse practitioners/physicians assistants, and midwives
- Additional 19 health centers nationwide
- 366 total providers nationwide (including founding member centers)
- 630 overall employees across all national Alliance member sites
- 35 delivery sites in the Chicago area and more than 95 nationwide

The Solution

After evaluating the capabilities and reviewing side-by-side demonstrations of a number of tools, the Alliance chose Centricity® Practice Solution, GE Healthcare's integrated clinical and financial management solution for ambulatory care.

"Ultimately when we looked 'under the hood,' it was clear that Centricity is outstanding in terms of its capability to collect and standardize clinical data for the purposes of quality reporting and decision support," states Andrew Hamilton, Chief Operating Officer, Alliance of Chicago Community Health Services. "Beyond the capabilities of the solution, GE Healthcare as a vendor demonstrated its experience helping organizations use Centricity to support quality initiatives," Hamilton explains. "In addition, selecting a vendor with financial stability and commitment to us now and in the future was important to us."

The Alliance provides a centrally hosted Centricity Practice Solution system for its delivery sites in the Chicago area and for the multiple sites associated with each of the 19 community care organizations that the Alliance supports nationwide. The hosted EMR and practice management system is located in a commercial data center in Chicago, deployed using Citrix®, and each organization that uses the system has its own database.

Three CHCs were already using GE Healthcare's Centricity EMR before joining the Alliance and are now transitioning to the integrated Centricity Practice Solution. "Centricity's single-solution approach offers the Alliance advantages because of our focus on data sharing to inform system change," Hamilton states.

Some community requirements vary among the Alliance organizations and Centricity's flexibility allows those to be managed at a local level. "This flexibility is an excellent example of why Centricity has become such a valuable tool in the Alliance's decision-making process," Hamilton says.

Results summary

- Twelve percent increase in provider productivity among four of the Alliance's early adopter sites
- No increase in FTE numbers with an estimated six percent growth in patient volume
- Efficiencies that allow for increased patient volume directly impacts reimbursement
- Business intelligence helps secure federal funding and guide proactive improvements in quality of care
- High levels of satisfaction among clinical staff

Measurable Impact on Productivity and Quality of Care

Centricity enables the Alliance to capture quality metrics, report on them, and use that information to drive improvements that impact the quality of care and costs.

"We can incorporate evidence-based practice guidelines into the tools in Centricity to guide clinicians' care of Alliance patients. This is profound and it would be impossible without a business intelligence tool of this stature," Hamilton says.

Since installing Centricity Practice Solution, the Alliance has tracked a 12 percent increase in provider productivity among four of its early adopter sites. In addition, greater efficiency has enabled the Alliance to move personnel into more strategic roles, while FTE numbers have remained constant even with patient volumes rising as much as six percent.

"The chart is always accessible now," says Dr. Mike Long, Chief Clinical Officer, Alliance of Chicago Community Health Services. "In the past, we needed to look for the chart for a walk-in patient, and sometimes we spent time waiting for the chart. With Centricity, that issue is completely resolved: we have constantly updated medication lists and problem lists."

"As a CHC, our Health Centers benefit financially from Centricity by being able to provide care more efficiently: they can see more patients and that improves both access and quality," Hamilton says.

"A critical element of the Alliance vision for HIT is integration with other health system databases to promote efficiency and continuity, and this was a driver in the selection of Centricity," according to Hamilton. "Laboratory systems are an area where we've seen tremendous efficiency benefits from Centricity. The time to get the provider's signature has dropped from days in some cases to hours or even minutes. This time savings also impacts quality of care, since physicians can now log on, look at the information, and make a decision even when they are at the hospital or at home."

"The immediate and expanded access to information provided by an EMR like Centricity is transforming care at patient, practice and system level. At the point of patient contact, better information leads to more timely and effective care to address patient need. Provider and practice level data allows us to evaluate variations in care and identify improvements. Population level data illuminates health disparities, helping us to better understand causes and possible solutions," says Dr. Rachman.

Proactive Improvements and Proof-of-Performance

The Alliance relies on Centricity to help benchmark patient care, report on care quality, and monitor business health with financial analytics. "Centricity enables us to capture data in a very structured way and we can easily retrieve the data to create an aggregate report of financial or quality measures and act on them proactively. Provider and practice level data helps us to identify areas for improvement and benchmark best practices," Rachman says.

"Measuring disparities in healthcare across various populations is an important focus in the CHC world. Having the ability to evaluate variations in outcomes at the population level positions us to more effectively direct improvement and advocacy efforts and help the Health Centers secure federal funding and needed changes in regional health policy."

"It is very important to us to be able to measure not from a sample of our patients but from the entire population, and Centricity makes that possible," Hamilton explains. For example, Alliance tracks the care provided to their diabetic patients, who number in the thousands. A traditional paper audit involving a sample of 100 patient records would have required more resources than some of the Alliance's participating organizations could provide. EMR-enabled measurement has allowed Alliance to target improvement efforts and simultaneously define high-level strategies using data on the whole population. For example, between 2007 and 2009, the average hemoglobin A1c level across all Alliance sites dropped from 8.0 to 7.8. Additionally, documentation of self management goals improved from six percent to 31 percent during that same time period.

The Alliance utilizes data warehouse and reporting capabilities of GE Healthcare's Medical Quality Improvement Consortium (MQIC). "MQIC provides easy access to reporting tools and to quality performance measures specific to clinical data," Hamilton says. "MQIC provides opportunities for benchmarking, allowing us to compare services and quality of care against a national set of data."

"Implementation of Centricity EMR is only the beginning," says Dr. Rachman. "Ongoing use will provide insights into how to further leverage the technology, and we're continuing to partner with GE Healthcare to apply those insights and develop ideas that allow the application to continuously improve."

Fred Rachman, M.D.

High Satisfaction Among Centricity Users

The Alliance has measured satisfaction with Centricity every six months since it was deployed and the results show very high satisfaction with the system. "Even about six months after go-live, 80 to 90 percent of the users responded that they would never go back to paper and would recommend the system to a colleague," Hamilton says.

Hamilton added, "Navigating information in Centricity is something that is rated quite highly by our users: they can find the information they need, when they need it."

"Any satisfaction rating will reflect on Centricity as a product and also on the implementation approach and method," Hamilton notes. "We've taken our experience with workflow in the CHC environment and combined that with the expertise of GE Healthcare and the flexibility of Centricity. The result is a system that provides easy access to information while also protecting privacy and data confidentiality."

Summary

For the CHCs supported by the Alliance of Chicago Community Health Services, Centricity has increased efficiency and helped the organization support a measurable improvement in provider productivity and quality of care. Centricity is helping the Alliance address health disparities in the communities served by its CHCs by providing the business intelligence to guide improvement and advocacy efforts and secure federal funding. Through greater productivity, patient volume has increased, which directly impacts CHC reimbursement. Redirection of staff effort and performance data to guide improvement efforts translate into a higher quality experience and outcome for patients.

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Our “healthymagination” vision for the future invites the world to join us on our journey as we continuously develop innovations focused on reducing costs, increasing access and improving quality and efficiency around the world.

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