

it's that easy

Pediatric Associates of Greater Salem | Salem MA

At a glance

- 2 locations in Greater Salem, MA
- Female Dr and male nurse
- 10 physicians
- Female nurse red hair
- 4 nurse practitioners
- 17,000+ patients
- Girl and boy pediatric patients
- 46,000+ patient visits per year

Solutions

- athenaOne®

Issues

- Staff overwhelmed with paperwork
- Had to make individual changes in siloed hard-coded system
- Difficult to get patients to engage with a patient portal
- Didn't have access to patient records across care sites

Results

- All faxed documents processed by athenahealth, saving staff time
- Ability to customize clinical rules with a single update for all the group's providers on the athenahealth network
- Increased patient engagement through use of patient portal to communicate with providers and access forms
- Access to patient records across care sites more easily through CommonWell and Carequality

Since its founding in 1972, Pediatric Associates of Greater Salem has remained integral to the Massachusetts North Shore community. As the group grew, it found that its siloed EHR system was limiting its providers' efficiency. They were affiliated with Partners HealthCare and used its home-grown system, which couldn't connect to other care sites. When the health system moved to a new EHR, Pediatric Associates realized that "it was going to cost an obnoxious amount of money," says Dr. Stephen Morgan, Chief Information Officer. "It would have bankrupted us as a practice." The only option was clear: find a financially feasible EHR vendor.

Pediatric Associates had experience with a system it didn't like, and its leaders knew what they didn't want in an EHR. The group was looking for an intuitive, user-friendly system that could learn from a provider's preferences and show a more complete patient medical history across care sites. It also wanted to empower its patients to conveniently engage with their own care. As the group met with different vendors, "the choice became obvious," says Morgan. The group was already using athenahealth's revenue cycle management service, athenaCollector, so its patient records were already on athenahealth's network. Pediatric Associates of Greater Salem decided to expand its partnership with athenahealth to the complete athenaOne suite, adding the athenaClinicals EHR and athenaCommunicator patient engagement services.

Never work in a siloed system again

When immunization schedules change or unexpected epidemics arise, Pediatric Associates needs to be able to easily and quickly update clinical workflows. As a practice, it decided to move its MMR vaccine from the 15-month visit to the 12-month visit. Updating all of the providers' templates "took eight seconds. I just went in, changed it once and it applied to everybody," says Morgan. The ability to make updates across the whole medical group helps Pediatric Associates keep up with industry changes.

Prior to using athenahealth's EHR, pediatricians worked in a siloed system without outside connections to other care sites. Very often Morgan, the pediatricians, and the staff had to complete administrative work after hours or at home. The paperwork for new patients was a burden as new patients arrived at appointments with a stack of their medical records printed out from other systems. Morgan and his colleagues struggled to get a holistic view of a patient's healthcare journey. The group had no way of viewing a patient's medical records across care sites. However, thanks to athenahealth's connections to thousands of providers, and many more through CommonWell and Carequality, Morgan now sees records of medical visits and procedures that occurred outside of his office. athenahealth's patient record sharing functionality and single network make it easier to deliver care and allow Morgan to absorb outside information. And new patients rarely need to bring in printed medical records because athenahealth's network often has access to their previous healthcare provider's records.

Case Study | Pediatric Associates of Greater Salem

Focus on delivering care

When using their previous EHR, pediatricians across the group felt burdened by too much documentation. When choosing a new EHR, Morgan's goal was "to take away as much of the paperwork burden as we can." In athenahealth's EHR, Morgan and other pediatricians can delegate work so they can focus on what matters most, delivering care. The nursing staff can complete prior authorizations and medicine refills on their own. "I just have to click authorize," says Morgan. Delegation of further work that is not necessary for the physician to complete gives them back valuable time. In fact, the group's pediatricians experience minimal interruptions. "Downtime has been minimal. If somebody can't do their work, they get really angry...so the fact they have been able to do their work without many issues at all is a great thing," says Morgan.

For Morgan, "the best systems out there are the ones that are intuitive [and] sort of know what the provider wants." The pediatricians at Pediatric Associates often notice that athenahealth's EHR learns from and remembers their preferences. For example, if a pediatrician consistently prescribes a certain antibiotic for an ear infection, the clinical workflow will be more likely to suggest that he "prescribe this particular concentration of antibiotic X as compared to Y," says Morgan. Pediatricians don't waste time searching for the information they need because it is easily surfaced. In addition to provider prescription preferences, Morgan also appreciated the value of pre-built reports and dashboards. "A lot of the reports and the things that are available through athenaNet are very helpful," says Morgan, "at a moment's notice I can say: what are my asthma control measures? Pull that dashboard up. Or even just the simple metrics of my same-day closure encounter rate." Unlike Pediatric Associates' old system, athenaOne lets its providers and staff focus on work that matters. "That's a sign of a good system – that it really only shows you the important things," says Morgan.

Encourage patients to engage with their own healthcare

In the past, Morgan had trouble getting his patients, and their parents, to interact with a patient portal. However, once he demonstrated how easily they could directly message their provider, as well as access school letters, camp forms, and immunization records, they saw the value of the patient portal and started to use it. Morgan also makes sure his patients have the documents they need when they are out of the office: "If there's a letter, I can just push it out to you. You don't have to go looking for it...and you can print it out from home."

Morgan believes in the potential that the patient portal has in influencing digital engagement, home care, and work that can be done outside the office. This is especially true for pediatric groups like his. Most, if not all, of his patients' portals are managed by their parents. Communication is "a lot easier for not just the patient, but the parents, the grandparents, the cousins, uncles, anyone who's a caregiver of this particular person," says Morgan. The parents, and other caregivers, of his patients really appreciate the ability to advocate for their child directly in the portal.

This feature becomes especially helpful in pediatrics. In Massachusetts, parents are not granted direct access to their children's portals once the child turns 13, which is often a problem for Morgan and his colleagues. "One of my patients a while back was a late teen who had a significant amount of medical complications, was nonverbal, had multiple different specialists, and the parent was very involved in their care...and then all of a sudden came the advent of patient portals, and in Massachusetts, with teenage confidentiality, [the parent was] essentially locked out of that portal [when the patient turned] 13." That's why Morgan appreciates that his patients between the ages of 13 and 18 can grant their parent or guardian full access directly in the patient portal. Before partnering with athenahealth, getting patients to engage with their own healthcare was a challenge. Now it's "an easy selling point" for Morgan and his fellow pediatricians. In fact, Morgan finds that athenahealth's system and services are easy to use for providers, staff, and patients alike.

As a technology, I found that athenaOne is very easy to use. And compared to other systems out there, it's intuitive; it's clean; it has a nice interface. It gives me what I need to know.

— Dr. Stephen Morgan, CIO, Pediatric Associates of Greater Salem

Ready to schedule a meeting? Call 800-981-5084 or visit athenahealth.com to learn more.