

MANAGED CARE

OUTLOOK

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At Presstime

CMS to Offer Beneficiaries Data on Physician Performance

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has announced that the Delmarva Foundation for Medical Care, one of its quality improvement organizations, has entered into subcontracts with four regional collaboratives as part of the Better Quality Information to Improve Care for Medicare Beneficiaries (BQI) project.

These regional collaboratives will combine Medicare data with data from other insurers to produce information on the performance of health care providers for the benefit of Medicare beneficiaries.

The following regional collaboratives have signed subcontracts: Indiana Health Information Exchange (IHIE), Massachusetts Health Quality Partners (MHQP), Minnesota Community Measurement (MNCM), and Wisconsin Collaborative for Healthcare Quality (WCHQ).

The results of the BQI project will be used for two primary purposes: first, to provide performance information to physicians that will assist them in improving the quality of care they are delivering to Medicare beneficiaries; and second, to give physician performance information to Medicare beneficiaries in order to help them with physician selection.

Additional information is available at www.cms.hhs.gov. ■

Fulfilling the PHR Vision: Analytical Interactivity Empowering Doctors and Patients

Lonny Reisman, MD

In today's fragmented health care system, patient data is scattered among physicians, hospitals, lab companies, and pharmacies. This can lead to medical errors, adverse patient outcomes, costly hospitalizations, and disabilities.

Efforts are now underway by leading health plans and employers to aggregate patient information into personal health records (PHRs). This aggregation of data into a patient-centered and patient-controlled record can empower consumers of health care and enhance care optimization among physicians, other caregivers, and patients.

(See Fulfilling the PHR Vision... page 3)

Lenox Hill Medical Group Realizes Savings, Convenience, and Reliability by Signing with ITelagen

Drew Nietert

As health care providers weigh the burdensome costs of building internal information technology (IT) departments to manage their IT operations, we have gradually begun to move to managed services to handle our IT needs. Many hospitals today are seeking service providers for all or a significant portion of their IT operations in order to access a high level of expertise and extensive resources without investing heavily in an internal tech staff.

With the managed IT services model, health care providers can draw on the expertise of companies that specialize in data management rather than reinventing the wheel in-house. Of course, this

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was filed with the district court in Little Rock alleging false patient claims were submitted to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services during the company's management of the acute rehabilitation unit at Baxter County Regional Hospital in Mountain Home, Ark. The plaintiffs also named the hospital in the suit. Earlier this month, RehabCare received notice that the Court found no substantiating evidence of the plaintiff's claims and ordered the case dismissed. The plaintiffs have notified RehabCare that they will not appeal the Court's decision.

West

Blue Shield of California Looks for New Way to Reach Out: Blue Shield of California is hitting the streets to take California's

health care pulse, giving people a chance to sound off with video "Chat Boxes" that will be set up around major cities. The not-for-profit company wants to hear people's concerns, experiences, and stories — the good, the bad, and the unbearable. The "Chat Box" campaign is part of Blue Shield's broad efforts to acknowledge consumer dissatisfaction with the health insurance industry, as reflected in a Harris Interactive poll released in May 2006. In the report, when asked how different industries serve their customers, consumers rated health and managed care companies just above oil and tobacco, the two lowest-ranking categories. The video "Chat Boxes" are part of a larger "We (Shield) You" marketing and advertising campaign by the insurer. ■

Lenox Hill Medical Group...

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model works only if the IT service provider is reliable, cooperative, and secure and if the savings generated are significant. Thus far, ITelagen (formerly NetGenIT), a Jersey City, N.J.-based provider of flat-rate virtual IT services, has satisfied those criteria for the Lenox Hill Medical Group in Manhattan.

Following our restructuring in the fall of 2006, the Lenox Hill Medical Group made a sweeping transition from paper to electronic medical records (EMR). The Lenox Hill Community Medical Group is part of the newly structured practice group Manhattan's Physician Group (MPG).

MPG completed its consolidation of eight medical offices, with some 100 physicians, including those previously associated with the Continuum Health System and the Lenox Hill Hospital, which continue to operate under the name Lenox Hill Community Medical Group. The group serves the health care needs of Manhattan neighborhoods with practice centers at 95th Street at 3rd Avenue and at 55th Street at 6th Avenue in New York City.

When Lenox Hill separated from our management company, we lost all our IT staff. Although the separation agreements allowed for support from the previous IT staff until Lenox Hill was able to put in place our own IT department, there were no IT personnel on staff at the time of the restructuring. As a consequence, the typical turnaround for almost any issue was a week or more.

During such restructuring as that undergone by the Lenox Hill Community Medical Group, especially as records are shifted to EMR, health care providers often look to the ability of IT service providers like ITelagen to deliver services rapidly on a flexible scale. The Lenox Hill Medical Group needed to set up a new information technology infrastructure within a tight 30-day window. We needed to find a company that had the resources to come in and take over within 30 days, with the ability to monitor, manage, do discovery of all software and network issues, and fix all systems.

We also needed help in setting up a new WAN (wide area network) infrastructure, and we found that ITelagen had the people and the support infrastructure in place already. The efficiency

goal Lenox Hill set was to take the one-week turnaround time for addressing problems down to 24 hours or less.

Our aggressive rollout, involving the installation of current and new software on over 200 new personal computers, threatened to be an administrative nightmare, especially since we had no IT personnel on staff. Speed to delivery was key.

We lacked the breadth and depth of experience that would make it feasible to implement the traditional help desk and internal tech staff, so we chose to have ITelagen manage our IT. The ITelagen software supports the platform of NextGen Healthcare Information Systems, and the ITelagen organization has a full contingent of NextGen-certified professionals on staff to provide comprehensive service and support.

The software used to manage the systems works behind the scenes. All of Lenox Hill's computers had to be replaced — going from dumb terminals to personal computers (PCs) in preparation for the new EMR/PM system. ITelagen assisted us in upgrading our WAN, including documentation of all software being utilized. We now have a complete inventory of all equipment, as well as a way of patching and monitoring all equipment. We also have a good support desk through ITelagen.

At the beginning the system had a few finicky problems, but those were handled quickly and effectively. I am happy with ITelagen's response time and its ability to adapt to an ever-changing environment. ITelagen not only keeps up with all the systems, patches, maintenance, and help desk issues, but it project manages as well.

Unfortunately, because Lenox Hill never had an internal IT staff to compare with having our IT managed by ITelagen, there is no way to precisely measure the savings in time and money. Nevertheless, there is no question that savings have been significant in the short run. I have estimated the amount of staff that would

be required compared to what ITelagen is providing, and the savings are definitely above 25 percent. In fact, early numbers suggest that savings in staffing costs may go as high as 50 percent.

Lenox Hill also has seen a marked improvement in efficiency. Using this tool to manage our IT needs has enabled us to easily meet the goal we originally set of reducing turnaround time for dealing with problems from a one-week average to less than 24 hours.

The flat-rate service includes both onsite and remote technical support. It uses intelligent network management tools to manage networks remotely over the Internet in order to identify and solve most computer support issues before they occur. ITelagen's RemoteAssist program delivers remote asset management that simplifies the administration of network infrastructure, allowing easy access to any managed PC or server.

RemoteAssist also enables service technicians to securely manage computers or servers. ITelagen's desktop management platform and client-based agent architecture deliver their service at a fraction of the time and cost of traditional IT consultants. The company's desktop management platform operates in a fully redundant SAS-70 Type II compliant data center, maintaining system and network security at all times, something that is absolutely essential when handling sensitive private health care data.

Lenox Hill's end-of-year business plan will weigh the costs of building an internal IT department against continuing with the current system, but we will not overlook the fact that for less than the cost of one excellent internal IT person, we get the support of a complete team.

Additional information about ITelagen is available online at www.ITelagen.com.

Drew Nietert is the interim CIO for Lenox Hill Medical Group. ■