

Performance Strategies



Connecting Physicians to Improve Community Care

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Connecting with Your Physician Community



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By now it's clear a connected healthcare community makes healthcare safer, supports delivery of the highest quality care and increases patient satisfaction. While the benefits of connectivity may be clear, how to go about it is not always that obvious.

In our rural community, [Oconee Memorial Hospital](#) (OMH), a 160-bed private, not-for-profit facility located in Seneca, S.C., has experienced great success in facilitating adoption of electronic health records (EHRs) by playing a supporting role to a unique, physician-led initiative.

Supporting a Physician-Led Connectivity Model

In late 2005, struggling with paperwork and growing regulatory and liability issues, visionary independent physicians in our area approached OMH to participate in the selection of a standardized EHR system. It was during the vendor selection process that the physicians began to see the value of creating a community-wide electronic health information exchange network.

Their connectivity model centered on the creation of an independent, third-party entity called [Foothills Health Information Network](#) (FHIN). A private, not-for-profit corporation, FHIN is an Application Service Provider (ASP). FHIN facilitates access by area physicians to McKesson's EHR and practice management solutions via the data center hosted by OMH. OMH also provides maintenance, technical support, training and other administrative services to FHIN on a contractual basis. In addition, we offer the use of our hospital marketing resources to help with promotional activities — a key part of FHIN's success.

FHIN's funding model was set up to be self-sustaining and covers the costs of licenses, implementation and maintenance for the EHR system. As a result, it gives every physician throughout our community an opportunity to participate. FHIN also is on the front lines of onboarding new members and has its own applications support staff.

By the end of 2007, FHIN expects to have 20 physicians on the system. These providers represent eight different practices, including specialties, such as general surgery, nephrology and rheumatology. Looking ahead, the goal is to increase the number of participating end users and integrate the system with Oconee's emergency department. The long-range goal is to expand the EHR system to providers outside of the local service area.

Working in the Background to Our Advantage

For our part, OMH has accomplished quite a lot in its supporting role. By providing physicians with access to a connected clinical solution, FHIN is making it much easier for all participants to adopt a system that eventually will be integrated with our own hospital's EHR.

In fact, while some may disagree with the approach of working in the background and quietly offering up resources, particularly for a hospital in an increasingly competitive environment, we have seen it as integral to achieving our goals. First and foremost, we are fulfilling our commitment to delivering patient-centered care. We are enabling practitioners to focus on what they do best, which is caring for patients, not installing hardware and software. Our work with FHIN also has furthered our aggressive information technology strategy. In short, our collaboration is helping us to improve care coordination, quality and capacity.

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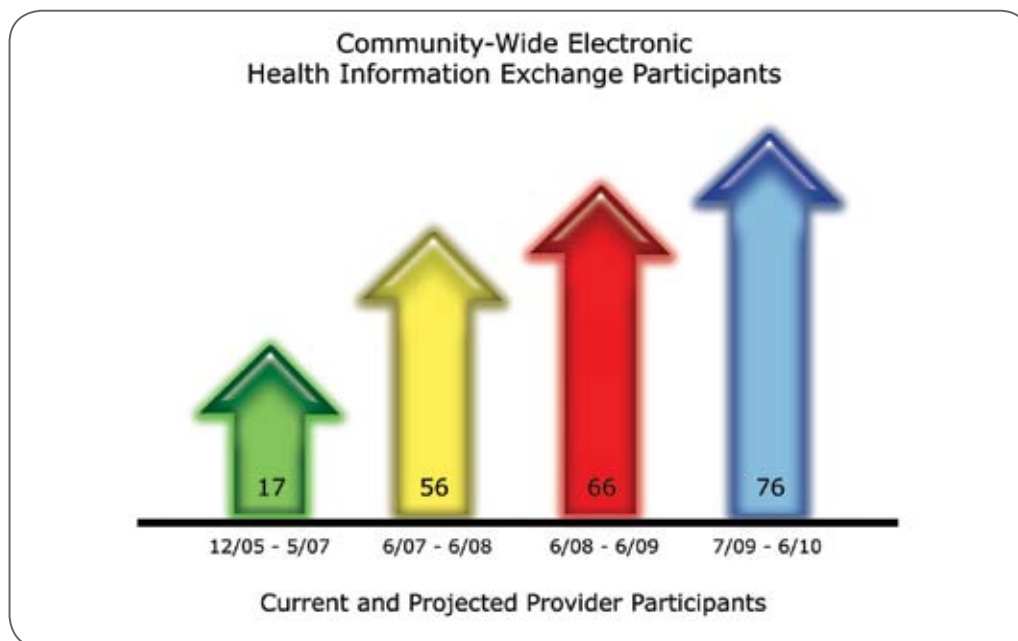
Connecting with Your Physician Community (Cont.)

If there is any advice I can offer in seeking strategies to connect with your community, it is this:

- Conduct an honest self-analysis on your IT credibility in the community.
- If that is intact, then start looking for ways to partner with physicians — now. There are bound to be a variety of grass-root e-prescribing initiatives under discussion in your own backyard.
- Join in dialogues with your local community and physician groups.

Regardless of who drives the initiative, through the local hospital's participation, it will make for safer care and better patient outcomes in the community. And that's what it's all about.

Jeanne Ward is President and CEO of Oconee Memorial Hospital in Seneca, S.C. She is a registered nurse, joining OMH as the Director of Nursing in 1974. Jeanne Ward developed nursing standards of care for OMH that later served as a model used by the Joint Commission.



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[FHIN and Oconee Select McKesson for e-Prescribing and EHRs](#)

[McKesson's Horizon Ambulatory Care™ Receives 2006 CCHIT Certification](#)

[Appalachian Regional Healthcare Connecting Physicians with McKesson's Electronic Health Record](#)

[Case Study: Medical Associates Clinic](#)