

Performance Strategies



Increase Physician Alignment Using IT Benefits

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Atlantic Health Focuses on Individual Physician IT Needs to Enhance Relationships



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Assessing Physicians' IT Appetite

Set up one physician with computerized tools such as [electronic health records \(EHRs\)](#) and e-prescribing, and you've got a friend for life. Try to do the same thing for another physician, and you've got a foe. This is the challenge of using information technology (IT) to enhance physician alignment efforts at [Atlantic Health](#).

With 250 employed physicians and another 2,400 affiliated doctors, it's difficult to devise a one-size-fits-all IT solution. Some physicians, for example, are eager to be on the IT cutting edge, while others don't see how computerization could possibly help to improve their practices.

To enhance relationships with physicians, we have found that we cannot dictate blanket solutions. Rather, we must get to know physicians individually and then offer them IT that will lead to an enhanced relationship. As a result, Atlantic Health offers a variety of potential IT solutions to our doctors.

Tailoring the IT Solution to Meet Physician Needs

Employed Physicians: For employed physicians, we provide an [ambulatory EHR](#) that includes tools for [automating patient connectivity](#). The system is integrated with our Inpatient EHR, providing employed physicians with an EHR that spans the settings of care and provides them with the information they need to make the best practice decisions.

Independent Community Physicians: For independent community physicians, we have found that taking an incremental approach and providing "light" solutions to physicians who are wary of IT works well. For example, instead of offering a complete EHR, we might offer just [connectivity tools](#) that provide automated appointment scheduling, patient messaging or e-prescribing. When the physicians notice that these connectivity solutions are bringing results – such as reducing calls to the front office – they start to appreciate the computerization effort. More than 500 physicians have signed onto the service so far.

Some doctors, on the other hand, welcome our all-out efforts. For example, when one independent physician recently joined our system, the doctor wanted the full IT package. We provided an [ambulatory EHR, medical billing and appointment scheduling system](#), plus the connectivity services. The physician wanted to open the practice with these electronic tools already in place. So providing the technology and implementation support helped us develop a good relationship from the start.

With independent community practices that already have EHRs, we often work with the physicians to see if they would like to push the envelope. For instance, our [results distribution service](#) enables us to immediately share hospital-based results with the practice, thereby making the existing EHR even more valuable.

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Atlantic Health Focuses on Individual Physician IT Needs (Cont.)

Solving Patient Care Challenges

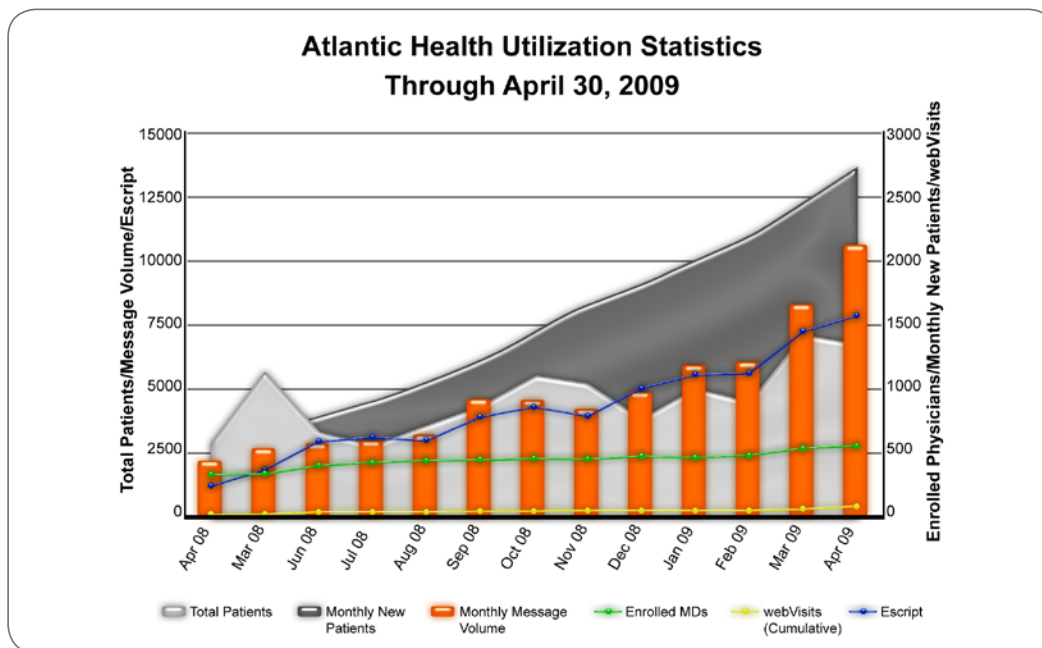
No matter where physicians are on the IT continuum, it's important for us as a hospital system to remember that we should not try to push technology tools, but rather partner with doctors to solve their problems. This creates a true partnership that benefits all involved — the physicians, the health system and most importantly, the patients.

For example, with the current economic recession, we are dealing with a growing number of patients presenting in the emergency department (ED) for primary care services. Of course, treating these patients in the ED is cost-prohibitive from our perspective as a health system. At the same time, physicians cannot afford to treat these patients in their office without being reimbursed.

To solve this problem, we are investigating ways to help physicians manage these patients through things like a medical home program, an initiative that enables patients to work with primary care physicians to coordinate and access a variety of community-based services. To make this option amenable to physicians, we will need to provide the support required: the social worker, the bundled payments and the IT resources that can make these programs worthwhile from the doctor's perspective.

In essence, our relationship with physicians is made stronger, not by providing certain IT tools, but by partnering with them to solve patient care problems and advance their medical practices — and then supporting such efforts with IT solutions, if necessary.

Linda A. Reed is Vice President of Information Systems and Chief Information Officer of Atlantic Health. As Vice President and Chief Information Officer, Ms. Reed is responsible for planning, acquiring and implementing information technology and telecommunications. Her primary focus is aligning corporate and business unit strategy with information technology requirements to deploy appropriate solutions to achieve the best possible experience for Atlantic's patients, physicians and employees. Reed obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree from Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J. She earned her Master of Science in nursing with distinction from Pace University in Peekskill, N.Y., and a Master of Business Administration from Widener University in Chester, Pa.



The use of online messaging, webVisits and e-prescribing at Atlantic Health has increased significantly between April 2008 and April 2009.

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