



Merge Case Study

Carolina Health Specialists

MERGE
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amplify your imaging value™

Streamlining Care with Anywhere, Any Time Access to Lab Information

Carolina Health Specialists® | Myrtle Beach, SC

CUSTOMER PROFILE

- COLA accredited Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments certified Physician Office Laboratory
- Processes almost 100,000 lab procedures a year
- More than 20,000 patient lab visits in 2011
- Hospital-based and outpatient primary care specialties and multiple sub-specialties
- Lab staff of 12

CUSTOMER CHALLENGES

- Improve efficiency as reimbursements are reduced while costs increase
- Provide physicians access to lab results, from anywhere, any time
- Interface with reference labs

SUCCESS WITH MERGE

- Physicians get secure access to results so can diagnose and treat patients faster
- LIS interfaces with their EMR and reference labs
- Built-in pick lists and checklists make staff more efficient and help streamline patient paperwork, increasing patient satisfaction

Carolina Health Specialists (CHS) is a multi-specialty network that serves patients in the Myrtle Beach, SC area. The Carolina Health Specialists Laboratory is a COLA accredited Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments certified Physician Office Laboratory that processes almost 100,000 lab requests a year, roughly equivalent to that of a community hospital.

Challenge

Over the past 20 years, Leah Stevens, Director of Laboratory Services for CHS has seen her fair share of change. But nothing compared to what she faces now. With looming reimbursement changes, new payer rules and government mandates, planning for the future has become difficult. “It’s hard to plan for the future when you’re unsure of the direction healthcare is headed,” said Stevens.

In addition to pending regulatory changes, CHS has had to deal with the fact that reimbursements keep going down, while costs don’t. As a result, they have to continually find ways to improve efficiency and productivity. For Stevens that meant finding a sophisticated Laboratory Information System (LIS) that would help her add value to her organization and the customers—both providers and patients—she serves.

They also work with a network of reference labs, and it was becoming increasingly challenging to interact with these labs with their existing system. So in 2010, they started looking for a new system that would enable them to achieve their goal of providing the best quality product – meaning lab information or test results – quickly and efficiently so their physicians could use that information to determine their patients’ health care protocol.

Solution

After eight months of due diligence, CHS selected Merge LIS™, a robust solution that interfaces with their AthenaHealth EMR System, AthenaNet, and reference labs, but also securely provides anywhere, any time, access to lab information.

Merge LIS provides web-based access to a central database for orders, inquiries, quality control and reporting. “Our physicians appreciate being able to access lab results from anywhere,” said Stevens. “They can review results from their laptop at home, or even from their smartphone and put together treatment regimens in a fraction

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Leah Stevens
Director of Laboratory Services

of the time it used to take.” From any web-enabled device, a physician would simply click on the login icon on the homepage. Once logged in securely, the lab results are presented in a familiar PDF format that is easy to read and interpret. Physicians can quickly see which test results are in or out of range based on the color-coded boxes. Results in green boxes indicate they are within expected range, results in yellow boxes indicate out of range, and results in red boxes indicate critically out of range and need immediate attention.

Another unique feature to Merge LIS is the customization of pick lists based on specialty utilization. The selection process is different for each specialty; therefore, it’s much more efficient for a technician to scroll through a customized list of their top fifty tests versus a never-ending list containing thousands.

Patient-centric needs are driving LIS adoption as well. Generally speaking, specimen samples are viable for only a certain amount of time. “If a sample is drawn in the morning in our laboratory, it is typically tested the same day,” said Stevens. “If you don’t have a dependable LIS and the system goes down, it makes it difficult to test your samples. And any type of delay in test results can have a negative impact on patient care and provider confidence in the laboratory’s reliability.”

Carolina Health utilizes the Code Check feature in Merge LIS to improve customer satisfaction in terms of billing and reimbursement. The system can inform staff when an ICD code is not the best match for an ordered test and a message can be sent immediately to the provider to request an additional diagnosis code(s). This sophisticated feature saves the practice valuable time and money that would otherwise be spent on reverse billing and or billing resubmission. The Code Check feature also helps reduce the labs Accounts Receivable Time (ART) by providing an additional level of billing claim review prior to claim submission to insurance. And it saves the patient the headache and financial burden associated with denied claims.

Keys to a Successful Implementation

For CHS, the key to a successful implementation was preparation and communication. They involved all stakeholders in the process and did their homework beforehand so that when the implementation team arrived, they could begin building the LIS according to CCHS’s specific needs.

They also developed a contingency plan to account for the possibility of interrupted workflow. While the goal is to have a seamless implementation, you should always assume there will be interruptions and plan accordingly. Make sure your staff knows what to do when and if there are interruptions and you will be ahead of the game.

Carolina Health also has a long-term vision. “We see technology continuing to help us improve our productivity and patient care,” said Stevens. “Merge LIS is helping us do that now, and we see even more potential with technology in the future, such as cloud applications. For example, we see many ‘snowbirds’ in our community. Someday soon, I envision their patient data being available to our physicians which will only improve our ability to care for them as they spend winters here in Myrtle Beach.”

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