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Mountain-Pacific
Quality Health

A Success Story:

Health Technology Services Guides Clinic through a Successful EHR System Implementation

The Blue Mountain Clinic of Montana contracted with Health Technology Services (HTS), a department of Mountain-Pacific Quality Health, to choose, implement and safeguard an electronic health record (EHR) system. HTS also assisted with securing federal funding and ensuring the system could be leveraged to meet the requirements for payment reform programs.

Choosing and implementing an EHR system can be a time-consuming and expensive task for any practice. There are more than 500 EHR vendors and the records themselves can have over 1,000 fields. If a practice chooses the wrong EHR for its purposes or fails to make its system secure, it can lead to a costly and devastating data breach that could expose patient records. That's exactly why practices look to HTS for assistance.

"The entire process with HTS was wonderful," said Annie Hansen, executive director of the Blue Mountain Clinic. "Working with HTS was dreamy, and I am not exaggerating. If anybody is going to implement an EHR for the first time, I wouldn't do it alone. Get help from the professionals. HTS probably saved us hundreds of hours."

A Trusted Partner and Finding a Solution
The Blue Mountain Clinic family practice opened in 1977 and sees more than 10,000 patients a year in Western Montana. In 2016, the clinic's board agreed to fund and implement an EHR system. It established an internal committee tasked with finding, vetting and ultimately implementing a system. The clinic contracted with HTS shortly after the committee was formed.

"I don't think there was any way we could have done this on our own," said Hansen. "There are so many companies out there, and HTS has so much familiarity with them they were able to narrow it down. It was well worth it to have HTS on board."

The HTS team methodically approached the project and provided a variety of services to ensure the implementation was a success. HTS first identified a project sponsor at the clinic to champion the project. Next, HTS developed a timeline for the project. Once a timeline and project plan were in place, HTS defined the criteria to evaluate and choose an EHR vendor, explained the demonstration process to the committee and set up demos with four EHR vendors HTS recommended. The committee then reviewed the systems and chose a vendor based on the clinic criteria and functions of the system.

With a customer-centered focus, HTS was with the clinic every step of the way. Not only did HTS staff create a plan and timeline using project management skills, but they scheduled the demos, worked with the clinic to identify a vendor, negotiated a price with the vendor and even vetted the EHR vendor's final contract.

"Not all clinics are the same, and we want to ensure providers have the best system for their needs," said Deb Anderson, health information technology and quality improvement consultant for HTS. "We assist with a selection process to find the best EHR to meet the demands of the clinic today and in the future. It's important for our clients to understand the processes and to know we are there for them whenever they need us."

The HTS team has more than 80 years of collective experience specializing in health information technology (HIT), EHRs, IT solutions and security. It is that first-hand experience that ensures every customer is successful.

Security is a Priority
Health records contain extremely sensitive and personal information, and protecting those records is one of Blue Mountain Clinic's biggest concerns. To ensure the new system was safe from a potential breach, HTS conducted a security risk analysis to identify potential threat and vulnerabilities to patient privacy and to the security of the electronic health records. The assessment was completed during the EHR implementation, a critical step to securing the system prior to using it in the production environment, protecting patients' health records from day one. The security risk analysis provided an evaluation of physical security mechanisms, reported on technical system mechanisms, relevant policies and procedures and provided recommendations on any compliance gaps in federal health care laws. Performing a security risk analysis is a complicated endeavor filled with ambiguities.

"One of the challenging areas facing rural health care is the decision to adopt an EHR, as it involves significant financial resources and a time commitment," said Susan Clarke, HTS health care information security and privacy practitioner. Clarke conducted the analysis. "By conducting a security risk analysis during their EHR implementation, Blue Mountain Clinic understood what was required under HIPAA law and took the steps necessary to ensure the EHR system had safeguards in place. These safeguards not only help protect their patients' information from a breach, but also helps the practice build a culture of compliance that embeds a secure foundation for everyday workflow across the organization."

Healthcare-related cyber breaches occurred in greater numbers in 2016 than in previous years. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights levied a total of $15 million in fines for Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)-based breaches from January to July of 2016. In 2015, the office levied $6.2 million in fines. Health care cyber breaches will only increase in future years, and the need for providers to safeguard their systems has never been more important, according to various experts.

Reimbursements and Quality Payment Programs
HTS identified and helped the clinic navigate and apply for two revenue funding streams. HTS first assisted the clinic with obtaining funding for its EHR system through the Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Program. The program provides funds to eligible providers to help offset the costs of implementing an electronic system. The clinic can land funds from the program until 2021. The EHR program is a way to encourage clinicians to implement electronic systems, and it is the first step in

participating in the Medicaid Meaningful Use (MU) Incentive Program, an initiative that promotes quality health care through utilizing EHR systems.

HTS ensured the clinic's system met the criteria of the MU program so the clinic would avoid a negative payment adjustment. The MU program has since evolved into another quality payment program, which includes the Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS). If the clinic had failed to meet MIPS criteria, they could have received financial penalties.

A Foundation for Success
The new electronic program will have many benefits for Blue Mountain Clinic and its customers. Whether scheduling a patient's visit and electronically reviewing his or her record or more complex tasks like data analysis, the clinic will be better positioned to meet the demands of its patients and the federal government.

"This was literally a life-changing event for the organization, and I feel like we were able to take our staff through the whole transition because we had HTS in our background," Hansen said. "I am really happy with the program we chose. We needed a lot of handholding, and we got a lot of handholding."

Now when a patient calls, his or her records can be accessed with the click of a button, introducing a new level of efficiency and better customer service. The system stores information that can be pulled through a report to see trends and measures in data, which can be used to help improve clinical quality measures. The system can also alert staff when a patient is due for a checkup or vaccine. The clinic is looking forward to learning more about using the system, and if they need assistance, HTS will be available.

About HTS—HTS is a team of trusted advisors who provide comprehensive, individualized support that helps clinicians and hospitals translate complex issues into practical health information technology (IT) solutions. HTS' broad, practical, health IT expertise can help maximize your incentive dollars, add efficiency in your practices and improve health outcomes for your patients. For more information about HTS services, visit http://mpqhf.com/corporate/health-and-technology-services/.

About Mountain-Pacific—Mountain-Pacific is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation and holds federal and state contracts that allow them to oversee the quality of care for Medicare and Medicaid members. Mountain-Pacific works within its region (Montana, Wyoming, Alaska, Hawaii and the U.S. Pacific Territories of Guam and American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) to help improve the delivery of health care and the systems that provide it. Mountain-Pacific's goal is to increase access to high-quality health care that is affordable, safe and of value to the patients they serve. www.mpqhf.org