Taking Healthcare Technology to the Next Level
How a rural Nebraska hospital advanced its technology capabilities

SUCCESS STORY
Situation
The story of healthcare information technology at Franklin County Memorial Hospital in Franklin, Nebraska, has a lot in common with the other 2,000 rural community hospitals across the country. Most rural hospitals feel the urgency to modernize technology solutions in order to keep pace with the demands placed upon them.

At Franklin County Memorial Hospital, the signs were clear. It was time for this rural Critical Access Hospital to advance its information technology capabilities. Government requirements for Electronic Health Records (EHR) and accompanying Meaningful Use reimbursement were, of course, significant factors. But the need was deeper. To provide the highest levels of patient service and care, the hospital needed to improve connectivity and coordination across departments within the hospital and also with affiliated clinics in Franklin and the nearby towns of Campbell, Hildreth and Red Cloud.

This is the story of the hospital’s journey to modernize its information technology structure to serve its patients and rural communities today and into the future.

Background
With a population of about 3,000, Franklin County, Nebraska, sits on the border with Kansas. It’s a decidedly rural county—162 miles from Lincoln, 213 miles from Omaha and 300 miles from Kansas City. The county’s residents, therefore, rely heavily on the county-owned Franklin County Memorial Hospital (FCMH) in the city of Franklin, population 955, and its network of clinics.

A Critical Access Hospital, FCMH has 14 beds for inpatient care and offers citizens in the area a variety of services, including pharmacy, x-ray, laboratory, surgery and emergency. Its motto is, “Big city services right here at home.” Despite its modest size, like most rural hospitals FCMH carries a heavy load. Rural hospitals must meet many of the same requirements of their much larger counterparts in more heavily populated areas—precise financial management, government regulations for meeting reimbursement standards, data reporting requirements and high patient expectations for quality of care.

FCMH decided it needed to look for an enhanced software system to meet the goals of meeting government regulations while improving efficiency and speed across its operations. In particular, the organization wanted to find a solution that could effectively link Electronic Health Records between the hospital and clinics, and among the various departments within the hospital itself, including radiology and laboratory.

Making it Happen
“We knew we needed to make a move to keep up with advances in technology, or we’d be left behind—especially by the federal government,” said Linda Bush, the hospital’s Administrator.

Bush said that an attempted installation of a technology solution from a Healthland competitor was “a nightmare,” and the project was scrapped with a feeling that the vendor overpromised and under-delivered.

A cross-functional review team led by Bush began the task of identifying a new technology partner. Team members included the hospital’s business manager, a physician, the hospital’s director of nursing, representatives from the radiology and laboratory functions, and a counterpart representing the affiliated clinics.
Choosing the Right Partner

After reviewing multiple vendors, the committee came back to the partner that had been part of the FCMH family for years—Healthland. Only this time, the hospital was graduating from the Classic legacy product to the fully integrated, advanced, Centriq® suite of solutions.

According to Theresa Rizzo, the hospital’s Business Office Manager, “We found Healthland to be an established company with history and a proven commitment to the rural hospital and technology market.”

Healthland’s Centriq solution was developed by working closely with rural hospital administrators and clinicians to meet their needs for quick, easy access to patient data, with special attention to gaining support of providers and nurses through the system’s ease of navigation and use. From that foundation, Centriq has expanded into a fully integrated suite of products, both financial and clinical, easily accessible from all care delivery settings—hospital, emergency department, clinic, home health and long term care.

“Besides the technology behind the product, we felt Healthland is a company that ‘gets it’ when it comes to the unique needs of rural hospitals. They understand us,” Bush said.

Converting to a New System

With the selection of Healthland, the stage was set for the migration to Centriq. “We all wear many hats in a small organization like ours,” said Administrator Bush, which meant that the hospital’s technology partner needed to be adept at working with organizations like hers. Dedicated support and a true sense of partnership was critical to the success of the project.

The hospital signed its Centriq contract in March of 2014, with a goal of going live with the system by fall. Theresa Rizzo, project manager for the migration, said, “We needed to start our Stage 2 Meaningful Use attestation process by October 1, so we can meet the September 30, 2015, deadline.”

To implement Centriq, Rizzo’s team included each of the hospital’s department heads, plus provider representatives. Throughout the spring and summer, the migration work was intense. “We named ‘Super Users’ who learned the system for their departments and who had responsibility for training other members of those departments,” Rizzo said. “We created a project plan, held regular project meetings and involved people throughout our organization with email announcements, reminders, lunch updates and brainstorming sessions,” she said.

Rizzo said that no technology change-over is 100 percent smooth, but “for the most part the actual installation was pretty easy” and was completed within the hospital’s time requirements. “Our previous experience with Healthland and its Classic product gave us confidence that we would have a successful migration,” Rizzo said.

Administrator Bush said the migration was smooth for the general hospital staff. She added that while providers somewhat lagged on adoption in the initial stages, they have gotten on board with the technology and are now comfortable using it.

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Support and Training

Training was a critical element of the successful migration, both Bush and Rizzo. Bush said she saw “beefed up” training and support from Healthland compared to her previous experiences. “The Healthland training staff was knowledgeable and helped us get up and running,” she said.

An important element of the training and subsequent migration was access to Learning Depot, a virtual, online training tool that helped overcome the scheduling challenges of conventional training. Bush and Rizzo found Learning Depot to be an efficient and cost-effective way to receive interactive online training and get quick answers to questions via the “Ask the Experts” feature.

Live on Centriq

The true test of a Health Information Technology system is when the software is launched and in use every day. “We’ve found Centriq to offer ease of use, along with providing us with the ability to stay current with technology,” Rizzo said, also noting that the ability to manage patient information in the patient portal, for example, helps the hospital enhance quality of care.

Bush pointed out that speed counts, in order to help a hard-working hospital staff become more efficient. “Now that we have all the patient information loaded into the system, we’re quicker,” she said.

The executives said that one of the key benefits of a smooth migration was in the financial management area. “The utility of the financial software is helpful to us, with relative ease of use. Financially, we were able to maintain the same patient load with no backlog, which means we got paid,” Bush said.

Bush and Rizzo cited multiple positive results from adopting Centriq, including smoother patient scheduling. And they said having the system and data to achieve Stage 2 Meaningful Use attestation in 2015 is another critical benefit.

But connecting departments with efficient and accurate data exchange to enhance the quality of patient care is among the most important benefits of the migration to Healthland Centriq. “Our hospital is achieving our goals for superior connectivity and collaboration among the various departments of the hospital through this new system,” Bush concluded.