



Glencoe Regional Health Services Improves Community Wellness with Preventative Care Technology

SUCCESS STORY

Background

According to recent studies, many Americans are lacking in preventative medical care due to obstacles such as high unemployment rates, financial difficulties, insurance issues, and even by choice or lack of awareness of appropriate preventative treatment. According to a recent Kaiser Family Foundation poll, 28 percent of middle income families are having serious problems paying for healthcare and healthcare insurance. The Health Affairs journal reports that the underinsured population has grown 60 percent in the past four years, and additional studies cite as high as 90 percent of the insured population are not taking advantage of preventative care services such as mammograms, vaccinations and cholesterol checks.

Regardless the reason for the preventative care deficiency, it's a disturbing trend that officials at Glencoe Regional Health Services, a non-profit organization combining Glencoe Area Health Center and Glencoe Medical Clinic, say can have a serious impact on a community. "Preventative care is one of the key factors to improve community wellness," said Cathy Werth, Glencoe Regional Health Services Supervisor, Business Services.

Glencoe Regional Health Services (GRHS) serves a community of 5,700, located 60 miles west of the Minneapolis, St. Paul metro area of Minnesota. The hospital has provided quality, convenience and personal care to the community since the 1940s. Today, GRHS includes a 25-bed-critical access hospital – with medical clinics in the towns of Glencoe, Lester Prairie and Stewart – a 110-bed long-term care facility, and a 40-unit senior assisted living complex.

To help move toward its goal of community wellness, GRHS has developed many technology initiatives over the years to enable its facilities to increase efficiencies and improve the patient experience. One key piece of GRHS's technology deployment efforts includes the move to Electronic Health Records (EHR) – a solution that has resulted in numerous benefits for the healthcare provider. Consequently, GRHS has continued to implement additional IT initiatives to support and enhance the new solution.

"We decided it was time for a more robust, automated recall system and selected Patient Care Guidelines solution from Healthland."

- Cathy Werth
GRHS Supervisor, Business Services

Challenge

As GRHS began to reap the benefits and experience success from its IT initiatives, officials decided to take the same approach as they reviewed their processes for preventative care. The facilities' tools for preventative care included a manual recall letter system for preventative physicals and a separate postcard system for pediatric immunization services. Although GRHS did have a few systems in place, the review of these systems revealed a disjointed, cumbersome practice at best

"It wasn't the image we wanted to portray," Werth said. "Our system wasn't consistent and it wasn't automated. And, patients only received contact if they came in for a physical exam. If our patients didn't come in for a physical, we had no way of tracking them – and those who didn't respond to the recall letter or postcard, simply fell off the list."

It was clear that the hospital and clinics needed a better way to track its patients care and help them take advantage of preventative health services.

Solution

"We decided it was time for a more robust, automated recall system and selected Patient Care Guidelines solution from Healthland," Werth said.

The Patient Care Guidelines solution helps clinics actively promote consistent preventative care throughout its community. As part of routine wellness and chronic illness treatment, these guidelines can dramatically increase the chances of detecting and treating health issues before they become severe or fatal.

Patient Care Guidelines can actually become a revenue-generating application. Through increased communication with its patients about preventative care services, many facilities experience an increase in visits and preventative procedures. The fully customizable solution allows each clinic to determine individual healthcare guidelines based upon each patient's age, gender, and/or diagnosis. It also supports the creation of a "Common Plan of Care" that can be used throughout the organization with all care providers following a uniform set of guidelines.

"For us, the easy answer was the Healthland Patient Care Guidelines solution," Werth said. "We've had a relationship with Healthland for ten years and are very happy with the products. As an organization, GRHS is moving to a one-vendor-system and it made sense to go with the Healthland solution."

The Patient Care Guidelines capabilities were important to GRHS as they were looking to consolidate all recall processes into one system and begin to add more complex processes such as diabetes and immunization tracking. GRSH's previous system did not allow for any type of complex tracking and there was no documentation for electronic records.

Action Plan

GRHS relies on project teams as it implements new technology. Most recently, the hospital developed a STAT Squad (steering team applying technology). The teams' mission is to use technology to enhance the hospital and patient experience. The group also helps prepare the IT timelines and roadmap, as well as any budget items relating to technology, with a focus on inter-department feedback and communication of technological advancements. The team is comprised of 16 staff including experts and power users of the applications from clinical /nursing areas, IT, business office, lab and imaging, pharmacy and health information management, as well as physicians.

GRHS also took a team approach for the planning and implementation of Patient Care Guidelines—made up of six professionals including physician, nurses, IT, business services and HIM. The team focused its efforts on preparations including staff education and development of training tools. They also spent many hours working through the go-live process, and pulled in additional team members as needed. The teamwork was imperative to the process, not just for planning purposes but for ongoing problem solving after the go-live date.

Obstacles in Implementation

As with any new technology project, GRHS faced some obstacles on the path to implementation. However, the implementation team was in place to work through the rough patches.

“We thought we had planned for everything,” said Werth. “But as good as planning is, unexpected issues do come up. The biggest obstacle we faced was resistance issues from the staff due to time constraints. For the staff, the scope of the work doesn't sink in until they really have to use the system. So we had to adjust our time and schedule as needed, to accommodate staff concerns, but not stop forward progress.”

The implementation team's plan was to start the Patient Care Guidelines solution with two physicians and their nurses at a time, and add two additional physicians each week. The team divided up necessary tasks to share the workload among the receptionists, HIM staff and nursing team. The physician then had the information for patients, and nursing used the interview form to complete Patient Care Guidelines entry from the checkout screen. The team then followed with lab and imaging staff training for completion date entry for lab work and mammograms, working to provide real time information.

Other challenges included changes to the system due to the hospital's special requirements. The recall letter required more design time than expected because of customization to its letterhead. Physicians also requested additional information on the interview forms. “It took some time, but we got it done and our Healthland representative was great,” Werth added. “The Healthland system has the flexibility we needed to produce the end-product and process that worked for us. This customization allowed us to make the interview forms more effective for our physicians and nursing staff.”

In the end, the implementation team was an important asset to make the project a success. Assigning dedicated resources to support staff concerns, address problems and trouble shoot is vital. “We needed to have a team working through issues because people in the trenches, working day-to-day, don't have the time to deal with it,” Werth concluded. “Our staff needed to know that someone is seeing their concerns and working toward easing barriers.”

Results

Officials at GRHS believe the Healthland Patient Care Guidelines will be a revenue generating application in the coming years. After informal monitoring, the healthcare provider has already experienced an increase in mammograms and physical examinations. They expect to have a more formalized approach to monitor results shortly.

“This first year has been a learning year for us,” added Werth. “We spent three months training and implemented gradually, and then we altered our timeline because of another grant opportunity.”

GRHS originally planned to use Patient Care Guidelines preventative services, followed by immunization services and finally diagnosed-based guidelines. However, the grant opportunity required the hospital to implement the diagnosed-based guidelines ahead of the immunization services schedule. Fortunately, the Healthland system had the flexibility to handle this type of event, enabling the hospital to take advantage of the grant.

“Since the implementation of Patient Care Guidelines, we are seeing an increase in screening for mammograms and physical exams and that will directly impact our community health and wellness,” said Werth. “We feel the implementation was successful. We’ve improved our process and can now track our patients in an easy, efficient manner.”

Now when patients come in, the physicians and nurses can easily see if they are due for services—like their annual mammogram—and can then schedule an appointment. The software also gives the physicians more on-the-spot information about the patient, creating a better rapport, thus providing better care.

With the state of today’s economy, Patient Care Guidelines can also help patients in financial need. If the providers notice key services are being missed, they can refer the patients to the business office to offer financial assistance. “Preventative services are so important to avoid serious health problems,” Werth said.

“With Patient Care Guidelines we are saving time from our old recall system,” Werth concluded. “We used to have our patients fill out immunization cards – which was inconvenient for them – and then nurses would file and mail cards. Reception staff would print and review patient recall lists before printing letters, stuffing and mailing. And with all of that, it wasn’t personal communication – it was just a form letter.”

“With our successful implementation we still had challenges – but scaling back the timeline and being flexible helped. In addition, our pre-planning and staff education were vital, particularly the use of weekly emails and FAQs to explain what this new application would mean for our staff and our patients. The implementation team can be flexible but still be firm and committed to the overall goals – and we needed to take the role of supporting the staff.”

Benefits of Patient Care Guidelines Solution:

- Helps physicians track patient care
- Provides an increase in appointments for preventative care
- Creates a more personalized and professional means to communicate with patients which improves rapport
- Enables a holistic approach to patient care – with each communication alerting to all preventative care services
- Interview forms reduce the need to dig through the charts and information is available at-a-glance



If they can do it, you can too. To learn more about our products and services and how Healthland can help your hospital become paperless, visit us at www.healthland.com or call us 800.323.6987.