Coastal Medical, Inc. is a physician-owned and governed Accountable Care Organization (ACO) founded in 1995. The group came together via the merger of seven small private medical practices and has since grown to 19 individual offices operating under the Coastal umbrella. Coastal delivers mostly primary care to 105,000+ patients, approximately 10% of Rhode Island’s population. The patient mix is predominantly commercially insured, with an 18% Medicare population, .01% self-pay, and 3.17% underserved.

Coastal Medical is the product of practice mergers. With a strong corporate foundation, new practices understand the benefits of a centralized infrastructure and the support that this provides. At the same time, each group has its own culture that is unique and important to the practice and its patients.

The selection of an electronic medical record that was intended to standardize processes across the entire organization made some offices uneasy and staff and providers expressed concern that they would lose their individuality with a standardized system. The varying levels of technology engagement and ability were also a concern, as Coastal was a relatively early adopter of EHR technology in 2005—2006.

Coastal Medical approached the EHR adoption process not as an Information Technology (IT) project as much as the implementation of a clinical tool that would help deliver standardized care, provide thorough and accurate documentation of that care, and generate the analytics that would substantiate Coastal’s mostly anecdotal evidence that they were delivery excellent care to their patients. What Coastal did not realize at the time, however, was the fact that the EHR would:

- **Generate higher fee-for-service payments due to complete documentation**
- **Allow them to participate in many pay for quality initiatives**
- **Result in more favorable contracts with major payers**
- **Form the foundation for Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH) transformation across the enterprise**
- **Generate revenue from the formation of a separate billing company that provides revenue cycle management services to practices outside of Coastal.**
Leadership/Governance
Leadership and Governance at Coastal Medical is built on a foundation of shared core values and a unique culture of inclusion. Coastal’s accomplishments as a company stem directly from the deliberate choice to always make the care of patients their first priority. Coastal works to pilot innovative programs in their medical offices and in conjunction with hospitals and specialty care providers by collaborating and openly communicating within all levels of the organization. This team approach to leadership and constant quality improvement has developed into a culture of learning that touches every member of the organization in meaningful ways.

It was through the process of implementing the eClinicalWorks electronic health record (EHR) that Coastal began creating workgroups comprised of members from every level of the organization; physicians, CEO, COO, Medical Director, Human Resources, Marketing, IT staff, office managers, medical assistants, and others. Coastal has built strong multi-disciplinary teams that operate in an environment of trust, collaboration, and inclusion. The adoption of a strong technology platform enabled Coastal to build leadership from within. Coastal strongly feels that the process of understanding how to best implement the EHR ultimately changed their organization for the better.

An inclusive EHR selection process was just the beginning of the collaborative effort that has since come to define the Coastal Medical community. The formation of inter-departmental teams and cross-practice pollination of ideas and best practices is standard practice at Coastal.

Investment in Human Capital
Coastal Medical’s organizational mindset is a case study in the building of a progressive medical organization from the ground up with a clear definition of goals and objectives for the IT investment. Coastal’s unique infrastructure as it relates to the development of health information technology was designed with the understanding that they were striving to achieve measurable clinical quality improvements, rather than simply streamlining processes with an IT solution. Coastal’s management, providers, and staff learned how to leverage a new kind of infrastructure in which the core focus was the innovative deployment and management of personnel and team building across the entire organization. This unique structure and emphasis on team building set Coastal apart at the beginning of their journey toward process improvement and continues as they expand on and maximize EHR use. Coastal credits its success with its implementation of healthcare information technology to their two-pronged approach to infrastructure: 1) invest in the right IT solution and importantly, 2) invest in the staffing needed to lead the initiative and sustain the momentum as the organization evolves.
Clinical Quality Improvement

The EHR adoption process that began in 2006 was the first step on Coastal’s journey to becoming a data driven, accountable care organization. First generation quality metrics included specific, measureable performance targets for the discussion of advance directives, smoking cessation counseling, and poorly controlled diabetics. The team approach facilitated coordination of care across the complex healthcare system. New patient-centric workflows were developed as a direct outcome of the EHR implementation, providing comprehensive care while capturing population health data. The registry reporting functions of eClinicalWorks have been used to generate the requisite clinical quality reports for Blue Cross Blue Shield Rhode Island, CSI-RI (the state’s chronic care sustainability payment reform plan), and the Beacon Communities program. eClinicalWorks reporting tools will be used to generate the quality reports needed to participate in the Medicare Shared Savings ACO program as well.

Return on Investment

Quality Target Participation and Performance

Coastal has achieved high levels of success in all of the quality improvement programs in which it participates:

- Blue Cross Blue Shield, Rhode Island (BSBSRI) - $1,705,000 in additional revenue
- Rhode Island Beacon Quality Improvement—$267,101
- NCQA PCMH Level 3 Recognition—91 providers across 19 practices—$3,439,410 in incentive monies
- Meaningful Use, Stage 1 attestation—48 providers—$1,059,000 in reimbursements

"We see the EHR as the foundation for all of our business strategies going forward."

Meryl Moss, COO, Coastal Medical, Inc.

Coastal has not only met or exceeded the clinical quality measure targets of these various programs, but also signed a ground-breaking PCMH contract with BCBSRI which includes significant non-fee-for-service revenues to providers and significant pay-for-process incentives to support enhanced access to care and interoperability. In 2012, Coastal and BCBSRI signed the first of its kind shared savings contract. That same year, Coastal also became the first Medicare Shared Savings ACO in Rhode Island.

Coastal has realized a significant return on investment (ROI) on the EHR implementation in financial terms, in terms of organizational growth and maturity, and in their improved ability to deliver quality care to their patients. The clinical quality reporting capabilities of the EHR enabled Coastal to participate in several substantial pay-for-performance programs. The increased coding efficiencies that are possible gives the providers confidence in their coding as they can see a comprehensive and professional progress notes that clearly supports the higher coding levels.
The “soft” ROI cannot be measured in terms of dollars but is a significant factor in terms of Coastal’s organizational maturity. While prior to the eClinicalWorks implementation, Coastal was a group of 17 individual practices, the process of EHR selection, implementation, training, and ongoing management has brought those practices together as a single, cohesive organization with a shared vision and clearly defined goals for the organization and its patients.

“*The EHR became the basis for measuring and improving quality. You can’t prove what you can’t measure.*”

Alan Kurose, MD, President, and CEO, Coastal Medical, Inc.

It is this unity that has been critical to Coastal’s success in major initiatives like the PCMH transformation project that was successfully completed in 2011. The foundation established by the EHR implementation supports Coastal as they move toward accountable care and shared savings with their major payers. The EHR and Coastal’s culture of collaboration makes participation in these initiatives possible, bringing the value of coordinated care to every patient in the Coastal community.

**Clinical Pharmacy Services**

All Coastal Medical offices have clinical pharmacists on site to provide Medication Therapy Management Services and Collaborative Disease State Management Services for the adult population directly to patients at no cost. The pharmacists provide consultative services to the pediatric offices and are available as a resource for drug information to all practices.

The pharmacists collaborate with the healthcare team on the care of patients. They see patients one-on-one for medication reviews, medication teaching, medication management, collaborative diabetes, lipid, hypertension management, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and HIV management. The pharmacists work with patients and the healthcare team to develop treatment goals and plans, develop a medication plan including monitoring patients for medication adherence, monitoring patients for optimal dosages and adverse reactions, titrating medications to achieve maximal clinical efficacy, and work to improve clinical quality targets related to specific disease states. The pharmacists are a bridge between patients and providers between office visits, providing self-management support, disease state education, medication education, nutrition counseling, and wellness, activity, and exercise counseling as well.

The pharmacists respond to drug information requests from providers, inform patients and providers of drug recalls, provide medication education to providers within the Coastal community, and provide training to medical assistants for medication reconciliation. The pharmacy team receives information on medication utilization, and
provides feedback to providers regarding prescribing habits. The team works to identify areas of opportunity and develops specific pharmacy initiatives such as a recent initiative to switch clinically appropriate patients from a brand-name cholesterol medication to a suitable generic alternative.

The Coastal Medical Pharmacy staff leads, oversees, and maintains an innovative training and educational program for students within the University of Rhode Island's Doctor of Pharmacy program.

**Continuous Quality Improvement**

*The In-house Training Team*

Early on, Coastal recognized the value of hiring in-house EHR trainers that have a clinical background. As with every decision made by Coastal, this was driven by the belief that approaching the training and use of the EHR from a clinical, rather than from an IT perspective, would put, and keep the patient’s welfare at the core of the EHR initiative.

The two trainers spend approximately 50% of their time working in the practices to:

- Identify areas of weakness in EHR use and develop a plan for optimization
- Work one-on-one or with groups of providers and staff to identify ways to use the EHR to support new workflows or improve efficiencies
- Deliver remedial training as needed
- Train new employees on the system
- Train on new features and functionalities that come with major upgrades
- Share best practices between every Coastal office
- Train on new eClinicalWorks products such as the Patient Portal, P2POpen, and the eClinicalWorks Electronic Health eXchange (eEHX®) as they are rolled out to each practice

The trainers are also chartered to:

- Lead a committee which meets regularly to identify areas for EHR Optimization and develop, plan, and implement changes in all offices
- Act as the first responder to technical issues; coordinate with the Coastal internal IT staff; and serve as the liaison between Coastal practices and eClinicalWorks Support
- Create user documentation on efficient workflows
- Monitor industry trends and educate practices on regulatory requirements (Meaningful Use, etc.)
- Represent Coastal regarding local and state-wide quality initiatives and industry groups
- Serve on numerous internal committees, representing the practices to executive management
2012 HIMSS Davies Award Winner, Ambulatory Category

“Coastal winning the Davies Award is really the result of a collaborative effort that has gone on for years now between Coastal and eClinicalWorks. The electronic medical record is a foundational piece of how we are transforming the way that we deliver care,” said Dr. Alan Kurose, Coastal’s President and CEO. Dr. Kurose continued, “I think the Davies Award came to us in part because of the unique way that we look at the EHR. It is a clinical tool—it is a foundational piece of how we deliver care so that we can improve quality, improve the patients’ experience of care, and so we can make care more efficient. You cannot deliver on those promises without healthcare information technology.”

Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH) Transformation

In early 2011, Coastal’s primary care practices achieved NCQA PCMH Level 3 recognition. Critical to this PCMH transformation process was the use of Nurse Care Managers and a team-based approach to care that emphasizes coordination of care across every setting. Contributing to improved coordination of care was the implementation of the eClinicalWorks Electronic Health eXchange (eEHX) that enables bi-directional, secure exchange of clinical information at the point of care between Coastal offices, Lifespan, the dominant academic medical center in Rhode Island, and other ancillary service providers in the Lifespan system.

Putting Patient Care First

“The Practice transformation to PCMH entailed changes in office workflow as well as new responsibilities for staff members. As we invested in our personnel via trainings and provided opportunities for professional development within the practices, we noticed a new level of professionalism developing in our offices. The staff was being asked to do more, but it was the real work of patient care which they found was empowering.”

Alan Kurose, MD, President, and CEO, Coastal Medical, Inc.

Return on Investment

The financial outcome of Coastal’s EHR implementation was overwhelmingly positive with a 200% return realized on the initial investment. Quantifiable ROI figures represent areas of P4P reimbursements, higher reimbursement from accurate coding, reduction in transcription costs with providers using voice recognition technology to dictate their own notes, revenue generated from new practices joining the Coastal community, and the new business venture of providing outside billing services to non-Coastal practices using the eClinicalWorks practice management system.

The soft return on the initial investment in the EHR technology has been immense and immeasurable and includes factors shown below.

- Organizational – 17 separate practices coming together to embrace one common culture and vision
- New processes for leadership and project implementations
- Significant reduction in duplication of testing and medication errors
• Ability to coordinate patient care through new PCMH teams
• Ability to access the EHR while on call
• Ability to respond promptly to local ER admissions of Coastal patients
• Connecting patients to their primary care provider through the Patient Portal and engaging them in their health care
• Ability to identify problems or trends that can be measured and improved through quality improvement processes
• Fast and effective communication mechanism for patient Care Team members
• Timely electronic access to laboratory and diagnostic imaging results
• Safe vehicle for prescription and refills
• Significantly improved risk management
• Increased staff job satisfaction
• Connectivity to Rhode Island’s health information exchange (HIE)
• Improved patient outcomes

Population Management - The Key to Improved Outcomes and Cost Control
“We found that the EHR gave us the tools to manage our patient populations. When you have the tools to manage your patient populations, you also have the ability to have different payer strategies. So instead of just accepting fee-for-service, we started to get pay-for-quality targets. With quality targets, we can actually look at the cost and start managing our populations.”

Meryl Moss, COO of Coastal Medical