FIRST CHOICE NEUROLOGY

FINE-TUNING A MEDICAL NETWORK

The Challenge

With more than 90 providers, 46 locations throughout Central and Southern Florida, and the need to work with more than 35 major hospitals, First Choice Neurology needed a healthcare IT partner that could integrate thousands of patient records, streamline workflows, and help them tackle the challenges of interoperability.

The Solution

First Choice Neurology looked to eClinicalWorks for the comprehensive Electronic Health Record and Practice Management solutions needed to turn a world of paper records, phone calls, and faxes into one where patient data is available electronically, on demand and in real time — and physicians can focus their time and efforts on patient care.

The Results

First Choice Neurology now enjoys fast access to comprehensive patient records and is implementing hospital interoperability beginning with the providers at Tampa Neurology Associates, who joined First Choice in 2017 and now enjoy access to patient records stored at Tampa General Hospital, the University of South Florida, and numerous private clinics.

First Choice Neurology
Fine-Tuning a Medical Network

Choosing the Right IT Solution

A medical practice as large and complex as Florida's First Choice Neurology resembles the human nervous system itself. Proper function depends upon a great many things going right — in the proper order and at the right times. When any one part of that system malfunctions, the effects on the practice — like the effects of disease in the human body — can be immediate, widespread, and serious.

"On a given day, between our inpatient and outpatient work, we service about 1,100 patients," said Jose Rocha, Director of the Central Business Office. "We have neuropsychology, we have pain management. We have sleep specialists.

Five years ago, in August 2013, First Choice Neurology chose eClinicalWorks for the comprehensive Electronic Health Record and Practice Management solutions needed to turn a world of paper records, phone calls, and faxes into one where patient data is available to providers throughout the system electronically.

We service about 35 different hospitals, from the Florida Keys all the way up to Tampa. We work with their stroke programs, epileptic programs, Parkinson's Disease, neuromodulation programs. There are a lot of different services that we provide throughout the state."

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Finding Value in a Sea of Data

Susan Steen, MD

For Tampa Neurology Associates, a long-established neurology clinic that joined First Choice Neurology last year, the benefits of being part of a larger organization, with access to eClinicalWorks, are clear.

"We're able to jump back into previous records, which were on Epic, to look up old records, old tests, old histories, everything," said Dr. Susan Steen, who has been a neurologist in Tampa for more than 34 years. "We just click a button in eClinicalWorks, and it will give us a patient's Problem List, allergies, medications, family history, social history, and immunizations. We can obtain Tampa General records by putting in a code, and they send us a code on our phone. We enter that and right away we can get into the Tampa General chart. It's made our care of patients much better."

Dr. Stephen Sergay, who has worked with Dr. Steen for many years, said that interoperability has definitely been of added value to him. "We have found it as easy as you could ever expect
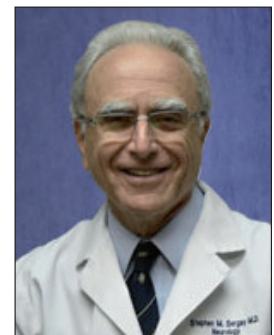
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— Dr. Susan Steen, First Choice Neurology

it to be because of the systems we've had through First Choice. If we had been just thrown into the fire, probably it would have been much harder, but I found it reasonably comfortable to work with eClinicalWorks."

Thanks to interoperability available through eClinicalWorks, the physician's work is now greatly simplified.

"We have easier access to medical records than we had," Dr. Sergay said. "In the past, we would depend on the patients bringing in their records,

and now we are able to get records automatically, as opposed to having to call the hospital or have the patient go get an old scan that they had. So, it has facilitated that capability for us."

Advantages of Interoperability

For Tampa Neurology Associates, then, joining First Choice meant not only switching their EHR from Epic to eClinicalWorks, but gave them the opportunity to fine-tune a complex system using the power of interoperability.

Dr. Stephen Sergay says that with interoperability through eClinicalWorks, he can find critical patient data much more quickly than in the past.

Interoperability — which is essentially a means of accessing and sharing patient histories on demand, regardless of where those records are housed — can be done in several ways. But some ways are clearly better than others.

"We could have done a very costly interface dump from Epic to eClinicalWorks," Rocha said, "or we could use Carequality. Well, the interface was about $15,000. The Carequality was free. So, we made an intelligent decision to use Carequality."

"Prior to Carequality," he added, "data sharing was through paper, faxes, more paper, more faxes, more paper, faxes. So, lots of paper!"

Now, patient records are available with a few clicks on a computer.

"The process for us, on a daily basis, is once the patient arrives, we're able to go into the Progress Note, we hit the little eEHX tab, and we go into the little paper clip, and there comes all the information that we need for the patient for the day," said Certified Medical Assistant Melissa Flores. "The providers love it. They go in, and all the information is there. They don't have to wait on us to go call the other doctors' offices to get information."
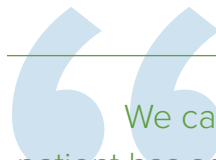
Putting It All Together

"We used to have patients sign releases and get their records. And we still do things like that," said Dr. Steen. "But for us to be able to access information within seconds or minutes about what has happened in this patient's past history, whether it was in the state of Washington or Miami, or wherever it was — to be able to gather that information is extremely important in taking care of the patient."

"We can see all of the providers the patient has seen," Flores said. "We can see any surgical procedures they have had, we can see their medications, their allergies. It's all just there with one click of a button and helps us provide care for the patient correctly."

"We can do that now with hardly missing a beat," Dr. Sergay said, "whereas before we had to think of it, and take time away from thinking about our patients. And we don't have that concern anymore. To me, the quality of the care we give is primarily based upon the time that we spend with a patient, both in talking and taking a history from that patient."

"The laboratory data is ancillary, it's a second-level thing. But now it's very important to have, and the opinions of others, and the experience of the patient in the past, knowing that information allows one to maybe not order as many tests, and even to avoid pitfalls, because the patient might have taken a certain medication in the past, they couldn't remember it, and might have had a side effect or so on, and so it's valuable for us to have that additional data." ■

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