

Signed On



A Successful Electronic Signature System Deployment

Firm commitment, detailed planning and comprehensive in-house marketing were key components for success in the recent implementation of Meta Health Technology's e-signature solution at University Hospitals of Cleveland (UHC) in Ohio. UHC is a 947-bed tertiary medical center and a member of the University Hospitals Health System (UHHS), a healthcare delivery system serving patients at more than 150 locations throughout northern Ohio.

Setting the stage

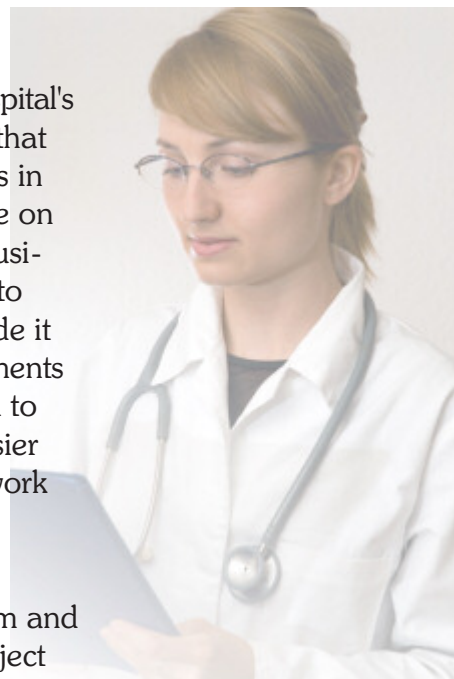
“Medical Records was not viewed as a department committed to physician satisfaction”, says Jim White, Director of Health Information Services at UHC. The primary reason: a work process that required physicians to travel to the various UHC locations to physically sign documents. Since UHC has seven primary facilities, the trek was a real burden for the medical center's 800 physicians. “We've got so much distance between our locations, it made clearing up incomplete documents a pain,” says White.

UHC already had components of an electronic documentation system in place, but they wanted their physicians to be able to electronically sign documents from any location via a web browser. They also wanted physicians to be able to access the e-signature system through the existing Physician Portal on the hospital's intranet. In addition, the e-signature solution would need to be integrated with the hospital's transcription, deficiency management and ADT systems, making the implementation more challenging than anything previously undertaken by UHC. So when the hospital was able to deploy the new e-signature solution less than a year after the initial planning — with no major setbacks — the project became a study in successful implementation.

Getting on board

A critical success factor was gaining support from the hospital's senior management at the beginning. UHC recognized that an e-signature solution could provide significant benefits in terms of efficiency and physician satisfaction. "Everyone on the senior team knew that for UHC to get the desired business benefits, they had to be signed on and committed to the project," says White. To that end, management made it mandatory for physicians to use e-signature for all documents that could be signed electronically. This decision helped to generate support from all levels of staff, and made it easier to deal with the inevitable changes in work processes, work flows, old habits, and older equipment

The next step was to launch an in-house marketing and education campaign to build a broad base of enthusiasm and support for e-signature across the organization. The project implementation team created flyers and brochures explaining the benefits the new e-signature solution. They developed a web-based tutorial that demonstrated the product's intuitive interface and ease of use. They also created a "How-To" guide for the Physician Portal to help doctors quickly get up to speed on e-signature when it came time for them to use the system.



Choose your friends wisely

For the implementation, UHC would be working with two vendors: Meta Health Technology, the provider of the new e-signature solution (and UHC's existing HIM software supplier), and MedQuist, UHC's transcription system provider. Since physicians would be using Meta's e-signature solution to sign transcribed reports, MedQuist was brought into the project at an early stage as an integral part of the development process. As a result, the efforts of the two companies were well-coordinated.

Working with their Meta counterparts, the UHC implementation team structured the project into four distinct phases, with a total timeline of nine months.

1 Phase 1: Build

UHC laid the groundwork for the migration, setting up the rules for the new process: Does an incoming document create a deficiency? If so, who will be assigned responsibility for signing it? How will data be integrated? At the same time, Meta developed the necessary interfaces to its deficiency system in order to create and clear deficiencies as the doctor signs, and

also to the MedQuist system in order to bring in transcribed documents. Meta also created PowerTrieve, a web-based data repository that would enable physicians to access documents from a variety of locations within and outside the hospital.

Phase 1 was completed in six months, with only the normal development issues of bug fixes and spec changes to address.

2 Phase 2: Trial

Once the system was installed, it was tested in a pilot program with two groups of physicians. The first group comprised 20 physicians from the Emergency Department, a small group responsible for processing a very large number of documents, and who had shown great enthusiasm for e-signature from the beginning. They were willing to use the new technology and to work with Meta in order to perfect it. The second group included 10 high-admitting physicians in other departments who provided a broader perspective on user experience. The trial phase itself delivered significant benefits: participants provided valuable suggestions for enhancements to the system, and, as a bonus, HIM management estimated that the ED pilot alone saved them close to 70,000 sheets of paper.

After six weeks of testing and problem resolution, the system was deemed ready for the next phase.

3 Phase 3: Rolling Out

Phase 3 gave all 800 UHC physicians access to e-signature. White reports that UHC encountered almost no problems at all with scalability or user support. "Since we did our homework in the previous phase, the actual rollout was an anti-climax." Most users had no issues, or, "nothing that couldn't be solved over the phone." Overall adoption and usage were high, which the UHC team attributes to good system design and to their own internal marketing effort. The hospital now monitors usage of the e-signature system, and typically contacts physicians whose usage is lower than expected to remind them about the system and to resolve potential problems.

4 Phase 4: Released

Finally, the e-signature system was opened to UHHS physicians system-wide.

What's next for hospitals like UHC? The reality is that even in hospitals that have implemented e-signature, between 30% and 50% of documents still need to be manually signed by physicians, including physician orders, prog-

ress reports, face sheets, and handwritten H&Ps. As a result, Meta has developed an add-on to its e-signature solution called *Scan&Sign* that enables all document types to be electronically signed and automatically routed. Through integration with its deficiency system, deficiencies are anticipated, assigned and completed automatically. This enhanced solution offers hospitals even greater efficiencies and also helps them comply more easily with JCAHO requirements.

Results: *Delivered & signed*

Since implementation, over 138,000 documents have been signed electronically at UHHS. The number of incomplete records (30 days past discharge) has dropped to its lowest level in two years. Visits to the Medical Records department by physicians have decreased by 15 percent, and are expected to drop even further, “once the old manually signed documents get cleaned up,” says White.

Now UHC physicians and HIM staff are benefiting from instant access to patient data anywhere in the enterprise, as well as greater efficiency and convenience in chart completion. The Medical Records Department is now leading the way in physician satisfaction.

For more information...

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