Overcoming EHR adoption hurdles

At a glance

Community
- Continuing care retirement community that offers skilled nursing, home care and other services

Organization
- Willow Health Care

Location
- Willow Springs, MO and surrounding areas

Challenges
- Continued reliance on paper
- Inconsistent user adoption
- Issues in claim formatting

Solution
- Netsmart EHR

Results
- 35% increase in EHR usage
- Consistent documentation across the organization
- Streamlined billing and claims processes
- Increased efficiencies and staff trust in the system

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Fine-tuning helps Willow Health increase usage and value

Willow Health Care is a continuing care retirement community (CCRC), located in the southern Missouri city of Willow Springs. In addition to independent living units, the non-profit organization manages more than 500 beds across skilled nursing, assisted living, residential care, therapy and dedicated memory care settings. Willow Health also delivers home and community-based services.

In 2015, Willow Health implemented a Netsmart EHR for long-term care. The decision was spurred by a desire to prepare for partnerships with other providers in the coming bundled payment environment. The Netsmart solution was selected for its ability to deliver a fully-integrated single patient record that unifies clinical, financial and census data across the full continuum of care. In addition, the EHR offered a comprehensive implementation strategy to standardize workflows across organizations and bring consistency in staff training, care tools and outcomes reporting.

Moving beyond the first phase

Following the first phase of implementation, results were extremely promising. With availability of information across settings and improved tracking mechanisms, staff no longer had to "chase the paper chart" to coordinate care across settings and disciplines. Additionally, integrated analytics provided corporate-level documentation oversight through custom forms, reports and dashboard widgets.

As the excitement and energy of this first phase waned, however, Willow Health leaders realized they'd only scratched the surface of what their new system could do. For example, workflow could be further streamlined to drive even more efficiencies. And, although staff members had

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>
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> Chief Financial Officer, Willow Health Care

received detailed configuration and training, some were still unsure of the system and didn't fully understand the benefits of using it.

"In our [EHR] infancy, we had not learned the proper way to use the system to reach maximum potential," said Sherry Miller, chief financial officer. "All the bells and whistles that sold us on the product were not being used."

Optimizing to boost value

To address the next phase of implementation, Willow Health turned to Netsmart to further optimize the new technology, apply some advanced configuration tools and help align the EHR strategy with evolving organizational goals.

Netsmart consultants targeted these key areas for optimization:

- **Removing paper from workflows,** including processing for MDS, admissions and pharmacy transmissions
- **Implementing new dashboards to streamline workflows** based on user responsibilities
- **Consistent use of best practices** and creation of a single method of caring for their patients
- **Review and analysis of the claims process** and verify that Willow Health had a streamlined billing and remittance processes for Medicare
- **Increased automation in home care** and further reduction of paper redundancies in admissions

The consulting team also recommended additional training to boost full adoption by users. The optimization team believed that focusing on consistency in documentation would be crucial to gaining full value from the EHR.

Focus on in-depth training and updated technology

After completing the initial two-day on-site assessment, the Netsmart team (customer account manager, product specialist and consultant) recommended an in-depth approach to:

- **Dashboard configuration:** This role-based feature allows users to control their view of updates, tasks and statuses of care plan items in their

area of responsibility. The Netsmart team worked with individuals and departments to ensure they understood the options and operational value of the dashboards and widgets associated with their positions.

- **Best practices:** The industry-standard workflows and care processes supported by the Netsmart EHR platform can help guide provider care, but have limited effectiveness unless they are used consistently. Again, presenting these care provider functions from a value-driven perspective helped users better understand the need for consistency.
- **Ongoing education:** As regulations change and software features are added or enhanced, a coordinated plan is necessary to ensure consistent organizational uptake and optimal platform usage across the organization.

Tapping additional resources

Willow Health also created an information specialist position to serve as the in-house expert on the new system. Responsibilities include managing use of the EHR platform, ongoing training efforts, usage monitoring, best practices promotion and internal troubleshooting for day-to-day issues.

"Implementing an EHR is a huge investment," says Miller. "Not including the adoption of a staff member whose sole purpose is the success and management

of the platform is not the area where costs should be cut. This is an ongoing critical role in your organization – not just during implementation, but from that point forward."

Additionally, Willow Health enlisted their Springfield, MO-based accounting firm BKD for assistance with understanding the financial aspects of the EHR platform. BKD helped the billing team work with intermediaries and insurance companies, establishing effective connections to streamline processes and alleviate roadblocks for Willow Health's finance department end-users. Billing workflows were also fine-tuned.

Impact and outcomes

As a result of the support of the Netsmart optimization team, Willow Health experienced a 35% increase in EHR usage, based on post-optimization metrics. They maintain a focus on usage data, with triple-check process documentation reviews.

Time-saving features in the platform are now used with consistency across the organization. Netsmart developed a variety of dashboard widgets for daily updates, processes and tasks, which are configurable to each role. The widgets verify the accuracy and completeness of patient information, and minimize time spent on redundant data entry. These improvements are creating efficiencies and value in the platform, which has in turn improved the trust of Willow staff in the system.

Advice to others

"Put the right staff resources in place from the very beginning to manage the EHR – prior to implementation. In trying to be self-sufficient, we tried to do too much on our own and had crippled ourselves in many ways," says Miller. "One staff member not following protocol can leave holes in your entire record.

"It is well worth the money to spend time with the experts at Netsmart to review what we use, how we use it, and how we can do better," she concludes. "An EHR is a living system that will grow and move each year, so we have to stay fluid and willing to adapt to be successful in the future.

"With the Netsmart EHR, we have that opportunity, and will continue to keep our partnership with Netsmart as a close team, so we are moving in the right direction – together."

Learn more about Netsmart clients at www.ntst.com/Hear-from-clients

About Netsmart

Netsmart designs, builds and delivers electronic health records (EHRs), solutions and services that are powerful, intuitive and easy-to-use. Our platform provides accurate, up-to-date information that is easily accessible to care team members in behavioral health, care at home, senior living and social services. We make the complex simple and personalized so our clients can concentrate on what they do best: provide services and treatment that support whole-person care.

By leveraging the powerful Netsmart network, care providers can seamlessly and securely integrate information across communities, collaborate on the most effective treatments and improve outcomes for those in their care. Our streamlined systems and personalized workflows put relevant information at the fingertips of users when and where they need it.

For 50 years, Netsmart has been committed to providing a common platform to integrate care. SIMPLE. PERSONAL. POWERFUL.