Mecosta County Medical Center Automates Health Data Delivery to State Agencies Using iatricSystems™ Public Health Interfaces

OBJECTIVE: Hospitals and other healthcare organizations send patient data to public health agencies to help identify health trends, meet immunization demands, and prepare for emergencies. Mecosta County Medical Center wanted to replace inefficient daily report faxing with an automated solution for sending health data electronically to public agencies. They also saw an opportunity to meet three Meaningful Use Stage 1 Menu Set Objectives.

SITUATION: As a long-time iatricSystems™ customer, Mecosta has long recognized the benefits of sharing healthcare information electronically, both internally and externally. When iatricSystems introduced its Public Health Interfaces, the hospital was one of the first adopters.

SOLUTION: Mecosta County Medical Center is using iatricSystems Public Health Interfaces to send clinical data electronically from its MEDITECH HCIS to the Michigan Department of Public Health. The HL7 v2.5.1 interfaces (Immunization, Lab Reportables, and Syndromic Surveillance) automate the sending process while fulfilling three Meaningful Use Stage 1 Menu Set Objectives.

RESULTS: Clinical data now flows seamlessly from Mecosta's HCIS into the public health agency's database, eliminating the need to generate reports and send faxes daily to the state. The solution is saving time every day for hospital staff while helping improve healthcare locally, statewide, and ultimately for everyone in the United States.

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A major goal behind Meaningful Use legislation is its potential impact on public health. By receiving relevant patient information from hospitals and healthcare providers, your community, region, and the nation can better prepare for emerging medical threats, future immunization demands, and more quickly detect influenza outbreaks, pandemic influenzas, and outbreaks associated with bioterrorism. Faxing patient data (the traditional way) is inefficient and unreliable, and Meaningful Use legislation provides an incentive to adopt an electronic solution. Three public health objectives (submitting immunization data, lab results, and syndromic surveillance to public health registries or agencies) are Menu Set Objectives for Stage 1 Meaningful Use, and are now requirements as Core Objectives in Stage 2.

As with other hospitals, these issues have had an impact at Mecosta County Medical Center, a 74-bed acute-care hospital in west-central Michigan. Mecosta has long recognized the future of healthcare information, where all patient data is exchanged electronically. They're also strong believers in the mission of improving public health, and they're taking action with help from iatricSystems. The hospital is using iatricSystems Public Health Interfaces to meet Meaningful Use Objectives and automatically send clinical data to the Michigan Department of Public Health in the format the agency needs to receive the data.

No Human Intervention Needed

"iatricSystems has taken a tedious manual process and made it completely automatic," says John Kuehn, Laboratory Director at Mecosta County Medical Center. "There's no human intervention required—no need for us to generate reports and send faxes daily to the state. The data is delivered electronically in the background while our staff goes about their normal work."

Mecosta was very proactive in moving forward with sharing data electronically with public health agencies even before it became an element of Meaningful Use. They purchased the three iatricSystems Public Health Interfaces (Immunization, Lab Reportables, and Syndromic Surveillance) as an attractively priced bundled solution, recognizing that it would save time every day while helping improve healthcare in their region and ultimately for everyone.

First in Michigan

Mecosta is the first hospital in Michigan to go live with syndromic surveillance, and may be the first in the state to go live with any of the Meaningful Use Public Health Interfaces. Next up is the immunization interface that is currently in production testing; to be followed shortly by the lab (ELR) interface.

John notes that one of the key reasons for this early success was the talent of iatricSystems staff. "We had an extraordinary individual working with us. She was pivotal in mapping our MEDITECH dictionaries to make sure information from Mecosta aligns with the information fields used by the state. She then helped us perfect the interface and test it to make sure it works for all scenarios that might occur."

Reaching Out on Their Behalf

Implementing public health interfaces requires not only technical expertise, but also the ability to plan and manage an interface project in an IT environment that is still evolving. States are at different levels of readiness for the three public health interfaces, and in many cases the data specifications for one or more interfaces are not fully defined. This is another area where iatricSystems was able to play a vital role for Mecosta.

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At the start of the engagement, iatricSystems met with Mecosta and public health officials from the state of Michigan to understand their level of preparedness for each interface as well as their expected requirements. "They reached out to public agencies on our behalf to make sure our data, processes, and priorities were correct," John adds.

iatricSystems created a strategic plan for implementing the syndromic surveillance interface and ensured that action items were happening in the background to prepare for the other interfaces to come. "They met with people from the lab, pharmacy, information systems, and other groups across the hospital to make sure everyone understood their responsibilities and timeframes. Their ability to plan and manage all the things we need to do will allow us to attest faster and get our Meaningful Use dollars sooner."

Technical Competence and Superior Service
Any implementation of this scope would be a challenge, but as a long-term iatricSystems customer, John had confidence in a rewarding outcome. "With their knowledge of the MEDITECH space and high level of service and guidance, we knew iatricSystems could make it work. Even though the project was technically demanding, iatricSystems worked through the challenges with us and it went very smoothly. I was always able to reach the iatricSystems team any time I needed them, and any questions we had were answered immediately."

"We were confident we were going to get good service because we had worked with them many times, and there was a level of trust I would not have received from any other vendor," John adds. "With their Public Health Interfaces, iatricSystems has exceeded my expectations once again."

To learn more about **Public Health Interfaces** please contact us using the information below.