

# Case Study >>>

## Health Information Exchange:

### How One Practice is Turning the Vision into Reality

Dr. Amanda Heidemann once enjoyed a flourishing private practice, but gave it all up to join the leadership of St. Louis-based BJC Medical Group (BJCMG), an affiliate of one of the nation's largest nonprofit healthcare organizations. Her motivation? The chance to revolutionize patient care.

BJCMG is one of a small handful of cutting-edge organizations currently engaged in health information exchange (HIE) at the private, community, and statewide levels. Through its robust use of the NextGen® technology suite, it has already gained significant improvements in clinical integration that have enhanced care quality and patient safety.

"I gave up my solo practice because I saw an opportunity to positively impact literally millions of patients community-wide, rather than just a few thousand in one practice," explains Heidemann, now EHR Medical Director at BJCMG. "I'm personally interested in tracking diabetes and obesity, for instance. Through HIE, I can help positively change the health status of the entire community, not just one practice."

Indeed, HIE is central in the national move toward Meaningful Use of information technology (IT) to improve healthcare cost and quality. As an early HIE advocate, BJCMG helps create the path for its peers to follow.

## Overview

### PRACTICE

BJC Medical Group  
<http://www.bjcmcdgroup.com>

### PRACTICE PROFILE

St. Louis-based BJC Medical Group, an affiliate of one of the nation's largest nonprofit healthcare organizations, includes 101 multi-specialty locations in greater St. Louis, southern Illinois, and mid-Missouri.

### BUSINESS PROBLEM

Despite its large size and scope, BJC Medical Group set out to improve patient safety and care quality by creating a unified patient record across its massive enterprise.

### SOLUTION

While selecting the NextGen® Ambulatory EHR and NextGen® Practice Management products, BJC Medical Group became an early advocate of health information exchange (HIE). Implementation of NextGen® Health Information Exchange now supports significant clinical integration. Plans are underway to further encourage population-based healthcare through community and regional data exchange.

### PRODUCT DISTINCTIONS

- Provider-controlled configuration allows data sharing parameters to be altered without changing the underlying architecture
- Secure connectivity joins practices with a NextGen Ambulatory EHR, a non-NextGen EHR, or even those without an EHR solution
- Single-point connection simplifies data exchange by removing unwieldy point-to-point interfaces

### CLIENT BENEFITS

- Significant clinical data integration among disparate practices
- Access to pertinent patient information within clinical workflow and from across the care continuum
- Straightforward adaptability as data exchange needs evolve
- Enhanced ability to meet HIE Meaningful Use requirements and earn ARRA incentives

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## Choosing the right technology

BJCMG started down the HIE path in 2005, when it implemented the integrated NextGen Ambulatory EHR and NextGen Practice Management platform. The group immediately understood the potential patient safety benefits offered by a unified record, but was challenged by its sheer size: 101 multi-specialty locations spread across greater St. Louis, southern Illinois and mid-Missouri. So it also turned to the NextGen Health Information Exchange (HIE) to connect its enterprise.

The organization was pleased with the product's comprehensive interoperability capabilities, as well as the company's record of implementations at sites of a similar size.

"We are owned, but with a lot of autonomy across the practices," says Heidemann, who urges all practices to:

- 1) Select a technology vendor with a track record of successful partnerships with clients and other vendors.
- 2) Make sure the technology company offers proven HIE implementation experience.
- 3) Choose an HIE solution with the flexibility to evolve as organizational needs change.

Heidemann recommends that before selecting an HIE solution, prospective users talk with actual clients. "That's how you really find out, for example, whether a system is configurable at the system, practice, or provider level," she notes. "Ask how many full-time employees it takes to keep the system running; it's less than one for us. Find out whether providers have a control panel they can use to alter configurations as their needs change, or whether you'll need a dedicated IT professional to change configurations. That's important, because groups evolve over time."

In fact, BJCMG is gradually evolving its HIE strategy in response to provider comfort levels, data needs, and the changing HIE regulatory landscape.

## The evolution of data exchange

For physicians used to working within their own patient charts, data sharing is a fairly new concept. So to gain provider confidence and buy-in, BJCMG decided to start with a small, defined HIE strategy and grow over time.

The initial system configuration allowed physicians to screen all repository data before deciding whether to import it into their record. Available information included medications, allergies, diagnoses, patient history, immunization history, and chronic conditions; providers gained access to it through the EHR in one of three ways:

- 1) Automatic query to the physician generated as the patient checked in;
- 2) Manual query and importation by the physician as needed; or
- 3) Through a Web portal for those without a NextGen Ambulatory EHR.

Physicians appreciated the ability to review information before importing it, but soon found they didn't want to wade through the large volume of data. So with a few mouse-clicks here and there—no need to reconfigure the NextGen HIE architecture—BJCMG smoothly transitioned to an auto-import strategy.

Now, all medications, allergies, diagnoses, and labs are automatically imported into the patient chart. In addition to easing data review, workflow is enhanced because clinical staff now can provide services such as medication reconciliation.

## Improving care quality

An up-to-date medication list reflective of all BJCMG providers is perhaps the most immediately visible benefit of the NextGen HIE. Specialists can import the list from primary care providers, for instance, alleviating the cost and time of duplicative manual data entry. But the patient care improvement is even more important.

Soon after implementation, for example, a drug-seeker was identified and referred for appropriate clinical intervention. Another patient failed to inform a surgeon about his blood pressure medications because he wanted clearance for an elective hernia repair; after review of the medication list, the surgeon's denial prevented potential tragedy.

"As a clinician, patient safety is the most important benefit I gain from active health information exchange," Heidemann states. "I'm now practicing in an urgent care setting. When patients come to me injured and hurting, they simply aren't thinking about providing me with a complete medical history." But with NextGen HIE, BJCMG's providers receive:

- Faster transfer of information between specialists and primary care providers;
- Easier care coordination; and
- Smoother workflow via single-point access to all patient information.

## New horizons

"It's every provider's dream to be able to see a single patient record," Heidemann observes. Through the exchange technology, BJCMG's providers access their central data repository right through their EHR, without leaving the application or going to another screen. And the information enters as discrete data—not "read-only" files—so providers can query, report, track, trend, and use it just as if they had entered it themselves.

"That's the lure of this," Heidemann says as she recalls her decision to join BJCMG. "It becomes a place to do population-based disease surveillance; to change the health status of a whole community."

BJCMG hopes to do just that, by unifying its own patient record and exchanging data with other community providers as well. The goal is to use NextGen HIE to simplify interfaces, first with non-BJCMG providers that have NextGen technologies, then with practices without the NextGen EHR. Eventually, the plan calls for using the technology to connect practices to a statewide HIE without cumbersome point-to-point interfaces.

There is little doubt that the greatest promises of HIE have yet to be realized. "These may be our first baby steps, but we'll get there," Heidemann pledges.



NextGen Healthcare Information Systems, Inc.

795 Horsham Road, Horsham, PA 19044

p: 215.657.7010 | f: 215.657.7011

sales@nextgen.com | nextgen.com

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