



Perham Health: InstyMeds Delivers ROI Beyond the Financial

Founded in 1902, Perham Health offers a comprehensive range of quality healthcare services focused on patient- and family-centered care through its 25-bed acute care hospital and three clinics. Affiliated with Sanford Health, Perham is committed to the core principles of healing, health and hospitality.

Despite its small size, Perham Health is a progressive integrated health system and a leader in the deployment of cutting edge technologies to improve care quality and patient satisfaction. It leveraged its relationship with Sanford to deploy the Epic EMR, and utilizes the Pyxis MedStation® medication management system.

“We have always been very progressive with technology,” said Duane W. Wallace R.Ph., Director of Pharmacy Services for Perham Health. “Our CEO is very progressive and our IT department is small but very aggressive. Even though we’re a critical access hospital, we were among the first of Sanford’s affiliates to go live on the Epic EMR.”



Challenge: Workflows Disruptions Create Havoc

Though multiple benefits have been realized from its progressive health IT strategy, it has not been without challenges. One particularly thorny issue was revealed almost immediately after EMR deployment in the emergency department (ED): the lack of an interface between Epic and MedStation required physicians to go through a cumbersome, duplicative process to prescribe and obtain medications for their ED patients.

“The only way was to enter the medication order on both the outpatient and inpatient sides of Epic. Physicians had to go through numerous steps to enter the prescription on the patient’s chart and then get the medication out of the Pyxis system,” said Wallace. “It could take as many as 40 or 50 clicks to complete the process. It was just too complicated.”

Wallace worked diligently with the ED staff and physicians for six months to design and implement the workaround, but ultimately it was simply too disruptive to the workflow. Frustrations boiled over. Eventually, physicians refused *en masse* to follow the process because it was impacting their ability to provide efficient care for their patients.

“Physicians were so frustrated that they were throwing prescriptions,” Wallace said wryly. “Patients were waiting hours to get an antibiotic.”

Many of those patients were rewarded for their wait with a starter pack of medication that contained a 24-hour supply and a paper prescription for the full course, as were patients who were seen in the ED after hours or on Sundays when the hospital pharmacy was not staffed. They were then faced with a 40-70 mile drive to the nearest retail pharmacy—a trip many did not make, impacting medication compliance rates and increasing the chance that those same individuals would suffer a recurrence or exacerbation and wind up back at the ED or admitted to the hospital.

“If you give someone a 24-hour supply of medication, that’s all they’re going to get. They’re not going to drive to the pharmacy to get the other nine days,” said Wallace, adding that the Pyxis systems also could not hold enough of the most commonly prescribed medications to carry through busy weekends. “We needed a solution.”

Solution: InstyMeds Automates Dispensing with 100% Accuracy

Wallace turned to InstyMeds, an automated system similar to an ATM that dispenses prescription medications directly to patients at the point-of-care. Determining factors in his decision to implement InstyMeds included the system’s track

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record of improving prescription fill rates and its ability to reduce downstream costs associated with patient non-compliance.

InstyMeds also reduces the risk of dispensing errors. In a [cross-sectional study](#) of more than 1,000 medications dispensed at 41 randomly selected sites in 12 states, the InstyMeds system achieved a 100% accuracy rate. Conducted by an award-winning researcher specializing in dispensing accuracy, the study found no errors among medications dispensed by InstyMeds compared to a 1.7% error rate (the equivalent of 5 million errors annually) among prescriptions filled at retail pharmacies.¹

Its InstyMeds dispenser contains the most common medications prescribed by Perham, including pain relievers and antibiotics, as well as several commonly needed over-the-counter medications. Bar-coded medications are packaged in a bar-coded magazine that tracks drug identity by manufacturer, lot number and expiration date. Inventory levels are monitored and automatically replenished by InstyMeds.

Interfaces for real-time patient demographics are used for insurance adjudication. InstyMeds also manages controlled substance reporting, including state Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs.

InstyMeds integrates seamlessly into the clinical workflow, and is “ridiculously easy to use. It honestly takes physicians about five minutes to learn,” said Wallace. “We have interfaced it with Epic, so the physician can do the documentation the patient’s chart and the information flows into InstyMeds along with our formulary.

“Our staff sees the patient, diagnoses what is wrong, gives them the prescription and they are done,” he adds.

Prescriptions are transmitted to the InstyMeds dispenser via Perham’s EMR, or using the web-based InstyMeds Prescription Writer. The patient is given a voucher and code, which they enter into the InstyMeds dispenser after identification verification. Any required insurance co-payment or fee is collected by the dispenser on behalf of Perham and the prescribed medication is released.

Patients with questions can access directly from the dispenser the 24-hour InstyMeds Patient Service Center, which is staffed by pharmacy technicians and pharmacists.

Benefits: Faster Throughput, Streamlined Workflows

Physician and patient satisfaction with InstyMeds was just the first of several significant benefits Perham Health has realized since implementing the automated dispensing system. Elimination of wait times due to the cumbersome prescribing process has helped boost patient throughput in the ED.

Further, because patients are no longer forced to drive more than an hour to fill their prescriptions, compliance has increased. This, in turn, has reduced the number of return visits to the ED, as well as readmissions and admissions associated with medication non-compliance. It has also impacted the overall health and wellness of Perham’s patient population.

Because InstyMeds manages controlled substance reporting, inventory control and insurance claims, it has reduced paperwork and streamlined workflows, freeing physicians and pharmacists to focus on Perham’s core mission of providing quality patient care. And, because co-payments or fees are collected upfront by the InstyMeds dispenser, Perham has seen an improvement in its accounts receivables.

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“InstyMeds is not a money-making proposition, and it’s not meant to be. We break even in terms of hard dollars,” he added. “But we also look at soft dollars, including things like physician and patient satisfaction, where the ROI is significant.

An unexpected benefit from InstyMeds has been a reduction in drug-seekers. Wallace notes that other EDs in the Perham area also use InstyMeds—facilities drug-seekers “would drive past to get to ours,” said Wallace. “That came to a stop with InstyMeds.”

The multiple benefits—faster throughput, greater compliance, reduced paperwork and higher physician/patient satisfaction—translates into a significant ROI for Perham. Those benefits are compounded by the outstanding customer service provided by InstyMeds.

“They put you first. It’s an easy, professional company to work with,” said Wallace. “I’ve implemented many systems and programs, and this has been one of the smoothest and most well-received.

[Flynn, E. A Study of the Accuracy of the InstyMeds Automated Prescription Dispensing System. 2014. <http://www.instymeds.com/uploads/newsarchives/A%20Study%20of%20The%20Accuracy%20of%20InstyMeds%20By%20Dr.%20Elizabeth%20Flynn.pdf>. Accessed on October 7, 2014.](http://www.instymeds.com/uploads/newsarchives/A%20Study%20of%20The%20Accuracy%20of%20InstyMeds%20By%20Dr.%20Elizabeth%20Flynn.pdf)