

Rawlins County Health Center

Atwood, Kansas

by Kristi Alvarado

Rawlins County Health Center solves the problem of patient record inconsistencies, using system integrations to streamline workflow and bolster a more positive patient experience

In 1950, the Rawlins County Health Center opened its doors in Kansas and its dedicated healthcare professionals have worked to care for all in need -- even providing local patients with the services of outreach specialists who fly, drive, or tele-med to serve their patient base. The facility maintains a full-service emergency room with adjacent radiology and laboratory departments -- providing services that otherwise might be inaccessible to those in the area, including X-ray, CT, EKG, DEXA, MRI, nuclear medicine and mammography.

Operations at the facility are running with high efficiency – they have minimized time-consuming inconsistencies in patient information, streamlined patient interactions, and defined and refined an incredibly positive patient experience that has improved quality of care for everyone involved.

Destiny Schroeder, the facility's Information Systems Director, and Sara Hatfield, Radiology Director, conducted the necessary research to ensure that the facility runs on an EMR and a PACS that integrate seamlessly. Having an integrated PACS and EMR is the foundation for efficient operation. One recent study proved that successful integration of the PACS and the EMR substantially decreases the time to access the EMR and is associated with a significant decrease in the proportion of studies for which radiologists need to obtain additional clinical data (Mongan & Avrin, 2018).

Several other practical factors influenced the search in addition to upfront cost; Schroeder and Hatfield also paid close attention to contract length, peer experiences, and payment model. Though they researched multiple well-known options, peer recommendation is what moved the needle – they ended up selecting athenahealth. “To stay with our previous vendor, we would have had to pay large, upfront costs, which we weren’t very comfortable with,” Hatfield explained.

Some of the challenges that the integration solved include inconsistencies in and inaccessibility of patient data and both patient and physician fatigue that often results from it. “A neighboring facility was already on athena, and they shared that with us, so we decided to look into it, too,” Hatfield said. “It really was the more affordable option. A large part of what set it apart from other vendors was that it didn’t burden us with those high, upfront costs, which made it much easier to get approval for.”

Another vital part of making the selection (and the eventual benefits the integration provided) was the athenahealth's ability to integrate exceptionally well with the facility's PACS of choice: Novarad's NovaPACS. NovaPACS includes various tool sets and modules designed to improve patient care while allowing the provider to develop best practices that reduce both wasted time and wasted effort.



Two key parts of the product's success at Rawlins were: (1) web-based reading, dictating and reporting, and (2) seamless integration with the facility's EMR. "Our providers have [NovaPACS] on their computers so that they can log in and simply look at images there instead of coming to the radiology department," said Hatfield. "We don't have onsite radiologists, either. We send everything out to be read, so being able to assign the study a password and send the information is helpful. It allows the radiologist to just log on to the PACS through the Internet and look at studies."

The high level of integration between the PACS and the EMR has also proven to be a helpful time-saver for those at Rawlins, due mainly to the way it helps cut out additional steps in the normal health center workflow. One such integration allows the EMR to pull in completed imaging studies from the PACS automatically to the patient's chart. This has saved time and effort previously spent scanning in medical records manually.

Another feature allows providers to click a link within a patient's report and view their images without even logging into the PACS – a provider simply needs to be logged in to the EMR and click on the link, and it will pull up relevant images without the provider needing to leave the EMR or switch screens. These integrations, and more, allow everyone at Rawlins County Health Center to have immediate, painless access to the same up-to-date patient information.

"Wherever the patient first appears and checks in, everybody has the same information the moment it's updated – from allergies and medications to insurances and demographic information," Hatfield said.

"It's made things easier for the patients not having to answer the same question multiple times, and for the providers because no matter where they are – at the hospital or at the clinic – they see the same patient information. It has made a huge impact."

Rawlins' plans include moving to Novarad's cloud-based storage for safer, more secure functioning and—as they have since 1950 — improving the health and quality of life of the individuals and communities they serve, setting the standard for patient-centered quality healthcare.

“Wherever the patient first appears and checks in, everybody has the same information the moment it's updated – from allergies and medications to insurances and demographic information. It's made things easier for the patients not having to answer the same question multiple times, and for the providers because no matter where they are – at the hospital or at the clinic – they see the same patient information. It has made a huge impact.

Sara Hatfield
Radiology Director, Rawlins County Health