

Healthcare IT News

Caritas starts huge EHR rollout January 2007

By Richard Pizzi, Associate Editor

BRIGHTON, MA – Caritas Christi Network Services, part of the second largest healthcare system in New England, is in the midst of an ambitious electronic health records implementation that will affect approximately 1,400 physicians in seven affiliated independent practice associations.

CCNS has contracted with Westborough, Mass. -based eClinicalWorks to provide an integrated ambulatory EHR and practice management system to CCNS network physicians, a process that will take approximately three to four years to complete.

“This is an unprecedented opportunity to create a network for all Caritas Christi physician offices,” said Asher Kramer, CCNS senior vice president. “We view IT as a strategic asset, not simply a technical asset. Our plan is to use this new EHR system as a means to link various physician groups together from a population management perspective.”

Kramer explained that the Caritas Good Samaritan Practice Corp. in Brockton, Mass. , was the first group in the network to implement the EHR system. That implementation, which took place last fall, was also part of a larger pilot project with the Massachusetts eHealth Collaborative.

“The Brockton implementation was a good learning experience, and taught us we need to go a little slower than we originally thought,” Kramer said. “We need to earn the trust and loyalty of physicians if we’re going to build a regional health network with really robust informatics capability.”

Chuck Podesta, chief information officer at CCNS, said Caritas Christi would provide the initial funding for a one-time, perpetual software license, as well as installation and training. He added that physicians would also make contributions to support the necessary hardware and network infrastructure.

“The EHR is one major part of an aggressive \$50 million plan to capture actionable information,” Podesta said. “We’re building a corporate-wide data warehouse that we hope to use for quality and pay-for-performance initiatives.”

Podesta also noted that CCNS would eventually integrate the ambulatory EHR system with the Caritas Christi Health Care hospital EHR system, which is provided by Meditech.

Girish Navani, CEO of eClinicalWorks, says management of the CCNS project is not necessarily more complicated than that of other ambulatory EHR networks, even given its scope.

“The Caritas project will be a vendor-managed application, but with the assistance of internal IT,” Navani said. “The software will be hosted in a central Caritas database, and all technical support calls will go through a Caritas help desk, to be triaged to eClinicalWorks.”

George Hill, health-care IT analyst at Leerink Swann and Co. , says the greatest challenge to CCNS will be training the physicians and gaining acceptance of the technology at the small practice level. But the implementation appears to be a good business move for CCNS and eClinicalWorks.

“This is definitely at the larger end of all the network physician practice implementations we have seen,” Hill said.

“But the larger the network of small practices you implement, the more compelling the value proposition.”