



## **Small Physician Office Achieves Meaningful Use and Receives Stimulus Funding**

The success of one small practice in Michigan is linked to the cooperation of their software supplier combined with their drive to further improve the quality of patient care. St. Johns Internal Medicine, P.C. achieved early Meaningful Use due to a strong working partnership with their IT vendor, Virtual OfficeWare, Inc., (VOW) headquartered in Pittsburgh, PA. Through their active collaboration, Dr. Christopher Beal, Internist at St Johns was able to complete Stage 1 attestation on June 21, 2011 and was awarded stimulus monies approximately nine weeks later.

St. Johns Internal Medicine is a small practice. They see approximately 100 patients each week in the office and operate entirely on a paperless Electronic Health Record. This system provides St. Johns' patients with state of the art access to information like verification of medication compatibility, insurance prescription coverage, electronic prescription, preventive health tracking and patient portal service connections (such as secure e-mail communication) with their physician.

Dr. Beal, the lead Internist and owner of St. Johns Internal Medicine has worked with General Electric's, Centricity EHR since 2005. He partnered with Virtual OfficeWare, an exclusive partner of GE Healthcare's Integrated Solutions business, to meet the specific needs of a small medical office. This partnership has proved vital to maintaining a leading edge in the ever-changing world of Health Information Technology.

Successful Meaningful Use Attestation was no small task. A complex set of changes occurred in Dr. Beal's office. This included the implementation of a series of software upgrades and workflow adjustments. Implementation also included new electronic office forms and a series of training for the physician and office staff.

Proper assessments and pre-planning for Meaningful Use Attestation is vital. Project management and having a support system on standby is essential. "Virtual OfficeWare was so attuned to the specific needs of my office and could provide rapid technical support. The VOW staff provided excellent problem solving resources and training. Their cooperation provided a springboard to achieve success far more quickly than our office's initial expectations," stated Dr. Beal.

Healthcare IT has the power to transform medicine, to positively impact the quality of patient care, improve outcomes and increase operational efficiency. Although there will be challenges and obstacles present with technology advances, they can be overcome with focus, team organization and the aid of IT experts. Empower technology and allow it to work for you.

Dr. Beal has identified some helpful tips when implementing an EHR for your practice:

**1. Identify the physician champion:**

The physician champion is the individual that will provide the focus necessary for effective implementation. They will be the project manager, the liaison with the service providers and practice. Change is challenging for most individuals, so a change in the office culture is imperative to success. All employees must be well educated in the value EHR brings to the practice and patients. Your champion is imperative to the success of EHR implementation.

**2. Work with a physician consultant or an industry professional that provides an unbiased opinion:**

Seek an unbiased and professional opinion from industry experts as to what system works best for practices of your caliber. Physician consultants can provide helpful metrics concerning the functionality and support of systems interwoven with technology companies as well as provide credible information on reputations of the providers.

**3. Connect with a sister site:**

Take the time to schedule an on-site visit with a practice of your specialty. You will visually learn how your colleagues are utilizing an EHR and gain a better perspective on how you can adapt the EHR into your own practice. Educating your medical staff within this capacity allows you to form strong bonds and network with other EHR users that you can later reference and ask for help during implementations phases.

**4. Select an experienced EHR partner:**

Invest in a system that has a proven track record. Partner with an IT provider that has the experienced staff necessary for implementation and ongoing support. Paying less money for just an “adequate” system, can cost you more money and time in the future. Make sure the technology fits your needs, not your practice conforming to a rigid software application.

**5. Realize that implementation and attestation require a time investment:**

Be aware that researching software and hardware along with selecting your EHR provider takes a few months. Then, the implementation process begins, which also takes several months. At this time, the final stage to attest requires 90 days of continual use. After successful attestation, monies are awarded. Collectively, the process can take nine months to one year. So, start soon to earn 2012 stimulus funds.

**6. Stay motivated and track your progress:**

Keep records of your implementation process, which is important for attestation. Being awarded stimulus money is a process and patience is needed. Stay focused and motivated to gain the rewards at the end.

“Virtual OfficeWare provided the versatility we needed with an EHR system. After reviewing several options, their base product and custom software options gave us the scalability we needed. Their expert support team provided responsive service with comprehensive training, implementation and follow up,” stated Dr. Christopher Beal, Internist.

Comprehensive software solutions are designed to be effective tools, helping physicians and their staff to become more efficient through the use of automation. Top tier systems will usually provide a substantial return on investment (ROI) over time. So, many providers inquire about ROI in the beginning stages

of researching EHRs and want to obtain an amount of profit they can potentially recover from their investment. And although tools are in place, such as ROI calculators that can measure and evaluate potential profits, there is one benefit that cannot be quantified, and that is time.

A physician's career and personal life can be greatly enhanced through an EHR investment. A standard workday of 8am-5pm is more common for physicians utilizing an EHR. The review of patients' charts is easily accomplished during the patient encounter or can be reviewed by the doctor that evening at home through a secure online connection.

Dr. Beal is passionate about improving the care he provides for his patients and connecting the medical community through electronic Health Information Exchanges (HIEs). He understands that the lack of legible, accurate and current patient information leads to added expenses and even medically associated complications. His commitment to implementing an effective EHR and willingness to share his experience will help other practices and ultimately, help patients. The Meaningful Use Legislation contributed to helping Dr. Beal make his connected-healthcare goals a reality.

**Following are websites for funding information and application guidelines:**

[https://www.cms.gov/ehrincentiveprograms/30\\_Meaningful\\_Use.asp](https://www.cms.gov/ehrincentiveprograms/30_Meaningful_Use.asp)

[http://www.cms.gov/EHRIncentivePrograms/10\\_PathtoPayment.asp](http://www.cms.gov/EHRIncentivePrograms/10_PathtoPayment.asp)

and/or ([www.cms.gov](http://www.cms.gov))

<http://healthit.hhs.gov>

**For more information on Virtual Officeware's Centricity and custom EHR products, visit:**

[www.virtualofficeware.net](http://www.virtualofficeware.net).

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