

CASE STUDY

ELK REGIONAL HEALTH SYSTEM IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY AND PATIENT CARE



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Quick Facts

Name: Elk Regional Health System

Location: St. Mary's and Ridgway, Pennsylvania

Focus: Community hospital

Integration: Meditech

Access products used: Patient Flow System, e-Forms Repository, Patient Label System, Check Printing module

Founded in 1922, Elk Regional Health System (ERHS) is a not-for-profit system that provides residents of Elk and Cameron Counties in Northwestern Pennsylvania with a general acute care institution, an extended care facility, an independent living facility, a home health agency and an employed physician group.

Administrators at ERHS realized the need for a forms management system to reduce the time and financial costs of printing, storing, and maintaining paper forms while having a positive impact on patient services, the budget and productivity.

ERHS's Information Technology team reviewed the organization's present needs and future plans when determining what to look for in a forms management product. With the implementation of Bedside Medication Verification (BMV), wristband barcoding was a priority. They were also looking for a solution to manage forms and streamline the registration process.

The team found that integration capabilities, ease of use for the end user and flexibility in deployment made Access's Patient Flow System (PFS), e-Forms Repository (EFR) and other products the best fit for the organization's current needs and future growth strategy.

“Access was one of the companies that could meet our organization's current need of barcoding for BMV, improve form management, and help streamline processes within the organization, while meeting ERHS future plans of scanning and archiving,” says ERHS CIO Mary Ann Schwabenbauer. “The fact that Access products are compatible with Meditech made the decision easier.”

ERHS is constantly seeking technological advancements that improve patient care and safety while enhancing processes, and recognized Access's potential in being a cost-effective method that would meet these needs.

Simplifying Admissions and Registration

Deploying an Access solution in the patient registration process, one of the areas where the wristbands would be issued, offered ERHS a new level of efficiency and precision that was not achievable with paper forms. Previously, pre-printed forms were maintained in the registration area. For each new patient, a packet of forms was manually created, according to the patient's demographics, type of procedure, insurance, and other variables.

Compiling forms packets manually, embossing forms with patient information and delivering these forms to other departments was a time-consuming process that created an opportunity for human error. The automated forms solution Access provided to ERHS eliminated the potential for error, allowing the registration staff to concentrate on providing better customer service to patients and staff.

ERHS found the solution to its barcoding needs in Access's Patient Label System (PLS), which offers a superior alternative to traditional linear barcodes by using a two-dimensional (2D) barcode. This allows hospitals to include more information in less space.

PLS operates as a module of Access PFS, which ERHS chose to automate its registration





The Business Problems

Wristband and forms barcoding is challenging

Increase accuracy of consent completion during registration process

Manual forms processing consumes employees' time

Reduce cost of in-house printing/storing pre-printed forms

The Solutions

User-friendly interface enables staff of all skill levels to work efficiently with barcoded forms and wristbands

Seamless integration with Meditech enables Access systems to share information with the HIS, helping keep patient data accurate and current

Access systems perform many barcoding and forms tasks automatically, freeing up time for value-add responsibilities

Using Access solutions to manage forms minimizes overhead

process. The PFS allows hospitals to design customized libraries of electronic forms to replace pre-printed documents. Based on registration information entered into the host system, PFS automatically selects the appropriate forms for the registration packet, populates those forms with patient data and prints them. Initial patient care documents can also be routed to the patient's destination, giving the location advance notice of the patient's arrival and eliminating phone calls and the timely process of assembling initial charting documents.

Forms Management Efficiencies

Like many health centers, ERHS struggled with finding an easy way to take obsolete forms out of circulation and replace them with updated versions. As a result, staff members would unknowingly complete forms that were no longer valid, causing confusion and diminished productivity. The Access product suite solved this problem, enabling staff to create an electronic library of forms that are easily updated by authorized users.

In a later deployment phase, ERHS added the Access EFR, which manages the forms library on a dedicated server. With EFR, every form is available in a category driven menu format, providing a fast and easy way to select and print patient-specific forms for one or more patients.

Instead of maintaining a large stock of preprinted forms that previously wasted valuable storage space, ERHS now manages forms in the secure electronic Access environment. This reduced the cost of running an in-house print shop, and the overhead of maintaining printing supplies and delivering forms.

Just weeks after implementation, the hospital reported workflow improvements, and reduced printing and storage overhead.

Rapid Implementation and ROI

In early 2007, ERHS created a group to evaluate essential forms and recreate them electronically using Access's forms design tool. The team began with a simple forms packet in Meditech as a test, and then moved on to more complicated projects.

"After the learning curve, Access's forms design tool can be used to create incredibly complex documents," says Lisa Connelly, ERHS's programmer analyst. "The use of sub-forms allows for ease of creation and consistency in format."

ERHS introduced Access PFS to the registration area, allowing for completed forms and patient wristbands to be printed based on the information entered during the registration process. Forms are routed electronically to printers across the hospital, based on admission location or services rendered. The user-friendly Access interface encouraged rapid adoption by end users, which contributed to a timely return on investment.

"Access has made the training of registration personnel easier," says Beth Slaughenhaupt, ERHS's IT specialist. "It reduced the amount of training necessary to teach the correct forms to pull and allowed the training to concentrate on learning the process of registration."

As the hospital continues to convert paper forms to electronic versions, it has implemented the Access EFR to serve as an on-demand archive for its complete forms library. When a specific form is needed, a staff member accesses the patient's record, views a list of relevant forms for that person, and automatically merges the patient's data into the desired documents.



“Prior to using e-Forms Repository, during downtime the patient would have to answer all the typical demographic questions that necessitate a registration. With EFR, the patient needs only to verify the information stored in the repository.”

The EFR solution enabled the Pinecrest Manor Facility (ERHS’s long term care facility) to eliminate the majority of its pre-printed forms in a short period of time.

“The staff at Pinecrest Manor is happy with the results of implementing EFR in their facility,” Schwabenbauer says. “It was helpful in the conversion from paper to electronic storage of the forms.”

ERHS also used Access software to create a data stream from Meditech to Access, allowing users to conveniently print directly out of Meditech’s order entry screen using the same form that is stored in EFR. This eliminates the need to maintain a form in Meditech, a paper form, and a form in the EFR. The EFR adds an additional time-saving element with its solution for HIS downtime.

“Prior to using e-Forms Repository, during downtime the patient would have to answer all the typical demographic questions that necessitate a registration,” said Melissa Swanson, System Analyst. “With EFR, the patient needs only to verify the information stored in the repository.”

EFR has streamlined the downtime process at ERHS, ensuring a better experience for patients and staff during the registration process.

The Access check printing module was also installed, enabling users to output high quality checks. This replaced ERHS’s old process of using an electronic laser chip, which had to be reconfigured every time check information changed.

A year after ERHS’s conversion to Access, the hospital has made significant process improvements in forms management, and is moving toward integrated, hospital-wide forms management and barcoding.

Improving Customer Service (Patient and Staff)

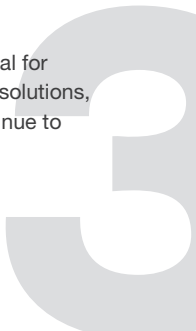
ERHC experiences a number of Access-related benefits that contribute to better customer service. Automatic forms printing in the registration area eliminates missed forms, document delivery delays and the need to ask patients to sign additional forms. It also acts as a notification system for various departments.

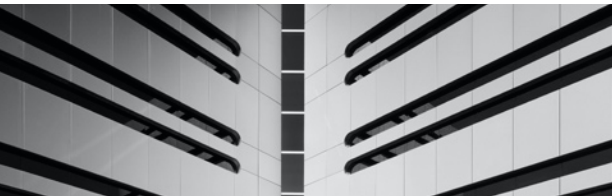
In addition, the Access solution has given ERHC the ability to create complex forms, easily update forms and auto-populate patient information, which ensures physician’s offices receive more complete and legible information. The new process also eliminates outdated unauthorized forms and increases data integrity.

Barcoding (through BMV) has increased patient safety through positive patient identification when scanning and administering medications. It is also helping the organization prepare for future implementation of scanning and archiving.

ERHS’s IT team continues to find new uses for the Access EFR. At Pinecrest Manor, an upcoming project will replace the ELF cartridge needed to print the state-required MDS forms. Access’s solutions will make it easy for ERHS to continue rolling out automated forms management to other departments.

ERHS also sees potential uses for EFR beyond patient areas, and there is potential for expansion into HR, finance and other business areas. As ERHS expands Access solutions, time and cost savings will be compounded and patient care and service will continue to improve.





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