

CASE STUDY

ERIE COUNTY MEDICAL CENTER ACCELERATING PATIENT ADMISSIONS



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Quick Facts

Focus: Trauma, burn, rehabilitation and cardiac care, teaching hospital

Location: Buffalo, New York

Beds: 550 inpatient beds and 156 skilled nursing home beds

Integration: Meditech

Products in Use: Patient Flow System, e-Forms Repository

Located in Buffalo, New York, Erie County Medical Center (ECMC) has 550 inpatient beds and 156 skilled nursing home beds. ECMC is a regional center for trauma, burn, rehabilitation and cardiac care, and is also a major teaching facility for the University of New York at Buffalo. ECMC is dedicated to being the medical center of choice for local residents through excellence in patient care and customer service.

ECMC is committed to advancing patient care and business efficiency through the implementation of appropriate information technology. Administrators realized that manually processing forms was inefficient, and that using card embossers and imprinters increased costs and led to the potential for errors in patient care. ECMC found that a large portion of its forms were outdated and others were duplicated. It was difficult to standardize and track forms, and sometimes there was illegible patient information on them, which presented a patient safety issue.

CIO Debbie Cancilla, the IT team and representatives from health information management (HIM) and nursing, realized that a forms and workflow automation system was the solution to these business challenges, and they established a set of goals for the project.

“The aim was to solidify part of a foundation to achieve a full Electronic Medical Record,” Cancilla says. “Also, with patient safety being a major concern, we recognized barcode technologies, the ability to improve the accuracy of patient identification and how both would reduce risk and improve patient care. All these solutions would help contribute to setting the stage for our advanced clinical applications, including Bedside Medication Verification.”

As part of this initiative, ECMC wanted to install automated forms distribution to facilitate more efficient use of time and resources. Administrators believed that forms automation offered the potential for direct time and cost savings, and indirect benefits such as faster, more accurate data output, better control over forms, faster forms access, and the ability to print patient data on the appropriate forms or labels on demand, at the point of care.

Other goals included integrating forms automation technology with an imaging and archiving solution, eliminating the time and labor involved with filing and pulling paper charts and enabling clinicians to quickly access patient information.

After a thorough analysis of multiple vendors, ECMC selected Access’s Patient Flow System (PFS) and e-Forms Repository (EFR).

Streamlining the Admissions Process

ECMC first deployed the Access solution in its admissions department. Access uses a proven project plan to set up a hassle-free implementation that empowers customers with a ‘train the trainer’ approach. “The Access implementation was great,” says Joseph





The Business Problems

- Paper-based admissions process delays registration
- Cost of obtaining forms from third party vendor increases overhead
- Forms waste negatively impacts the bottom line and the environment
- Staff members spend too much time managing paper-focused processes

The Solutions

- Patient data automatically printed on forms and wristbands, speeding admission and enhancing safety
- Eradicated costs of ordering and storing paper forms
- Minimization of forms waste, as outdated and duplicate forms are eliminated
- Process automation gives staff more time to focus on meeting patients' needs

Mogavero, systems analyst at ECMC. “We were designing and outputting forms in the first week.”

Staff members have responded positively to the time savings the Access PFS provides. “The admissions staff loves the Access application – they wouldn’t want to live without it,” says Justin Darstein, graphic design technician at ECMC. “With just a few mouse clicks they can print 30 forms for 10 patients. It gives them more time to spend meeting patients’ needs.”

Before implementing the Access system, ECMC ordered pre-printed forms from a third party vendor. When new patients were admitted, staff members retrieved forms from shelves in a storage area and embossed patient demographics using stamp plate machines. A similar process was used for patient wristbands. The Access solution has completely changed the process for the better.

“We’ve automated the admissions process with Access PFS and EFR,” says Larry Moessiger, healthcare information systems specialist with ECMC. “Staff members get the exact packet of forms they need, which includes forms, wristbands and labels. Also, patient demographics are outputted right on them and the clarity of information is much improved.”

The Access solution has also enabled ECMC to eliminate the set up, printing and delivery costs of using a forms vendor, and the admissions staff has repurposed the area once used to store hard copies of forms.

Multi-Department Efficiencies

After a successful roll out in admissions, ECMC extended PFS and EFR to numerous areas across the facility, including the emergency department, gastrointestinal unit, immuno clinic and vascular lab.

ECMC finds that PFS has improved communication between departments. It’s easier for ECMC’s pharmacy department to attend to forms sent via PFS than getting phone calls from colleagues requesting information.

In addition to assisting the pharmacy, the Access solution enhances surgery scheduling. Physicians enter scheduling information via an in-house online application, and then use PFS to print the form in the corresponding department. Finally, they schedule the surgery event in the health information system (HIS).

When relying on manual forms processes, there were, redundant and outdated forms, which increased costs and created hassle for ECMC’s staff members. The forms design tool allowed the organization to create standard form templates that can be shared by the entire organization. “We’ve eliminated duplicate and triplicate forms, and that’s definitely provided a cost saving,” Mogavero says. “It’s also easier to respond to the needs of our physicians because we can create new forms quickly using the Access design tool.”

“Being able to standardize forms across the board greatly helps to save time,” adds Darstein. “By updating one instance of a form every department gets the new version.”

ECMC uses a Meditech HIS, which drives its patient-focused activities. When new features or advancements come along in a Meditech release, the organization’s forms needs change, and administrators look to Access to help them adapt. “Whenever we start using



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Meditech in a new way, we have to create new forms or alter existing ones, and Access’s forms designer allows us to do that easily,” Darstein says.

PFS enables ECMC to easily set up the routing of forms and to monitor their progress through every stage of the workflow. This capability has delivered a new level of efficiency.

“Healthcare is a paper-intensive industry, so having the ability to automate and track forms processes is essential,” Mogavero says. “The Access solution contributes greatly to our time management initiative.”

Meeting the Hospital’s Goals

Since its implementation in 2003, PFS and EFR have consistently satisfied the needs of various departments at ECMC. Patient safety has been improved with the introduction of the Access solution. The incorporation of barcoding technology has allowed for more accurate identification of patients by including required patient demographics on forms. The clarity and legibility of this information makes it much easier for the staff to concentrate on their duties.

Access has also contributed in ECMC’s ability to implement other patient safety measures, such as Bedside Medication Verification. This facilitates cross checking of patient medications with Access-produced patient wristbands, using third party bar-code scanning technologies.

With the Access software, distributing forms across the hospital has also become easier. Whenever a patient is admitted, paperwork that corresponds to the patient’s reason for visit outputs automatically with all their demographics. “We are able to create logic-based workflow that determines what will print at the time of admission,” Mogavero says. “This allows us to supply appropriate documentation with accurate patient data, helping the hospital streamline the paper flow process. It also eliminates the tedious manual processes involved with assembling, distributing and warehousing forms.”

The Access Advantage

While selecting cost-effective, feature-rich software is important, choosing the right vendor is also key to the success of any IT project. ECMC is satisfied with what Access has delivered. “Access is a great vendor to work with,” Mogavero says. “Their support team responds quickly to any concerns we have and always follows up. I’d definitely recommend Access to anyone whose organization has forms management needs.”

ECMC is already using the Access product suite in multiple patient-focused areas, and administrators plan to further expand their forms management project, with the goal of introducing further time and cost savings.





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