

CASE STUDY

TANNER HEALTH SYSTEM HELPING STAFF WORK SMARTER AND FASTER



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Quick Facts

Name: Tanner Health System

Location: Carrollton, Bremen, and Villa Rica, Georgia

Focus: Full service hospital

Employees: More than 2,000

Integration: Meditech

Tanner Health System is a three-hospital organization with facilities located in Carrollton, Bremen, and Villa Rica, Georgia. With more than 2,000 employees, Tanner offers a comprehensive range of medical services including cancer care, rehabilitation, occupational health, home health and hospice. Tanner continues its tradition of innovation by adding new programs, and facilities to meet the medical needs of its growing population area.

Tanner began its pursuit of a paperless forms system in 2003. Using pre-printed forms, the medical records department was running out of storage space, and inefficient procedures stifled productivity. Tanner’s manual forms processes jeopardized data accuracy and consistency and led to unnecessary expenses. After implementing Access’s Patient Flow System (PFS) at its three facilities, Tanner is close to achieving its ultimate goal of a paperless operation. Support staff spend less time and money managing pre-printed forms, and physicians have better access to the information needed to deliver superior care.

The 202-bed Tanner Medical Center/Carrollton, provides a wide range of both inpatient and outpatient services, including OB, same-day surgery, and 24-hour emergency services. Two other facilities, in Villa Rica and Bremen, Georgia both underwent multimillion dollar expansions in recent years to accommodate the growing healthcare needs of the region. As Tanner grew, so did its need for more efficient work processes. The abundance of paper forms required to capture patient information had become unmanageable.

The medical records department was running out of space for paper files, while clinical areas and nursing stations were cramped by pre-printed forms. Other departments, including HIM and materials management, recognized the potential benefits of reducing their reliance on paper and automating the use of medical forms.

Benefits of Forms Automation

Tanner’s forms system was once completely paper-driven. The pre-printed forms process was managed through a third-party forms vendor and an in-house print shop. The vendor designed new forms and handled special requests, while the print shop replenished the three hospitals’ stock of existing forms. Staff distributed these paper forms to appropriate areas throughout each hospital. When an area of the hospital ran out of pre-printed forms, staff ordered more from the print shop and waited for delivery. Meanwhile, the print shop was overworked as it continually juggled a backlog of forms.

To complete a patient encounter, workers assembled forms and manually affixed patient information labels on every page. Next, they hand-delivered completed forms to the nurses and or physicians receiving the patient. After the visit, HIM staff scanned the forms into Tanner’s document imaging system and manually indexed the data.

In 2003, Tanner deployed a barcoding system for its pre-printed forms, enabling the





The Business Problems

Slow access to paper forms delays patient care and service.

Using a third party and internal print shop to design and deliver forms increases overhead and delays processes.

Manual tasks associated with manually managing paper forms inhibit productivity.

An enterprise-wide forms management system is required.

The Solutions

Instant forms access improves the patient experience.

Distributing forms electronically cuts printing costs.

Elimination of manual forms-related tasks boosts productivity by 75%.

Easy expansion of Access system to materials management, human resources, accounting, pharmaceuticals, and medical records.

document imaging system to automatically recognize each form. This relieved a lot of manual indexing for HIM staff. However, barcoding didn't provide automated forms processing, and productivity and cost concerns in other departments were not addressed.

Tanner's IS team worked with the organization's document imaging vendor to identify an electronic forms specialist, and Access topped the list. They realized that Access's PFS and e-Forms Repository (EFR) would integrate seamlessly with the Meditech HIS. The Access suite enables hospitals to easily design customized forms in-house, and then distribute them directly to the point-of-need for printing, faxing, e-mailing and archiving.

Seeing the potential for significant savings of time and money, Tanner purchased an Access solution in January 2004 and immediately involved end-users in the startup phase. "We let our clinicians tell us which forms they needed most, so we could make the most immediate impact with the e-Forms system," says Laura Wilson, assistant director of information systems.

Powering Productivity

Access technologies reduced Tanner's reliance on its forms vendor and eased the workload of the in-house print shop. As forms are managed electronically in EFR, users always have immediate access to current information. Patient data can be auto-populated and printed on forms, and without the need to affix labels, forms are ported directly into the imaging system and indexed automatically.

Tanner's IS team consolidated 5,000 forms, some of which were outdated or duplicates, into 2,000 forms that are managed in EFR. Shortly afterward, Tanner deployed Access at the registration desk. The team created a single project in Access that automated completion of facesheets, patient consent forms, physician acknowledgements, pin instructions, armbands and labels, charge sheets, ER documentation, ER discharge instructions and more. Each document was customized to match the specific facility, patient type, and type of registration.

"Our conversion plan was very aggressive and we put a lot of stress on the system," says Terri Lee, HIM director at Tanner's Carrollton hospital. "But Access stepped up to the plate and met each challenge head-on to make it all work."

Wilson admits to being surprised by the overwhelmingly positive response of staff to the Access suite. "Sometimes people are naturally resistant to change, but we experienced just the opposite with Access," she says. "We did a 15-minute demo of the new system to a group of nurses, and within a few days we had nurses from all over the hospital demanding Access for their areas."

The Access system has made a tremendous difference at Tanner. The trio of hospitals has reclaimed much of the storage space once occupied by pre-printed forms, and patient service and care has improved. PFS eliminates many time-consuming manual tasks, empowering staff to focus on key responsibilities. Access's PFS retrieves patient data from the HIS and auto-populates it on all corresponding forms. The registration desk then sends the forms to a printer in the department the patient will visit, cutting out the tedium and delay of hand-delivery.



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“Access helps our people work smarter and faster,” Wilson says. “We can control exactly which forms print and where they print, which means areas that are expecting patients can have the right forms ready even before the patient arrives.”

Improving Care

The PFS’s Patient Data Intelligence recognizes patient demographic characteristics and makes automatic adjustments to the group of forms it prints. For example, female patients visiting the maternity ward require specific educational forms, and Access automatically includes these in their information packet. “Now that printing forms is no longer our primary responsibility, we have been able to reassign our personnel to work on other priorities,” says Peggy Wright, materials management director. The print shop now focuses on producing marketing materials for the Tanner system.

Scanning into the document imaging system and the accompanying manual indexing has also been eliminated. Forms flow automatically from Access’s Image Portal directly into the imaging system, freeing HIM personnel from the burden of manual tasks.

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The powerful yet intuitive Access design tool makes it easy for Tanner administrators to make changes to their forms processes. By training employees to create and update customized forms, each hospital manages its own needs without the expense and delay of calling on a forms vendor.

Another significant efficiency created by Access is the newfound ability of Tanner’s administrators and clinical workers to instantly access up-to-date patient data. “Perhaps the biggest benefit of Access has been the speed with which clinical staff can get the information they need,” Wilson says.

Future Possibilities

Tanner’s IS team saw that the efficiencies delivered by the Access system can also add value in areas beyond the patient floors. Today, Tanner uses Access to automate forms processes in materials management, human resources, accounting, pharmaceuticals, and medical records. To extend the impact of its forms automation project, Tanner plans to incorporate Access’s Fax Portal and electronic signature capabilities.

The fax application builds on the efficiency of PFS. For example, a patient’s facesheet can be faxed directly to the physician’s office at the time of registration. In addition, some health insurance companies require notification that an account holder has been admitted to the hospital. Access’s Fax Portal can be configured to automatically fax them the patient data. As it expands the Access solutions further, Tanner will continue to improve patient care, reduce costs and boost productivity.



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