

Delivering the EHR: New Mom Works to Implement EHR at Large Healthcare Organization

Save to myBoK

by Chris Dimick, staff writer

The electronic health record (EHR) system at Allina Hospitals and Clinics is more than just software and data to Amber Johnson, RHIA. As a manager on the Minneapolis, MN-based healthcare organization's implementation team, Johnson knows firsthand the importance of the EHR system and how it provides better care to Allina's patients.

That's because Johnson will be a patient at an Allina hospital, giving birth to her first child. Johnson says she takes comfort in delivering at a facility that has a fully functional EHR. "It's exciting for me to be a patient and know that my information will all be there and available," she says.

Johnson has helped develop and implement the EHR system at Allina since starting work with the organization nearly three years ago. To date, eight of Allina's 11 hospitals and all 65 clinics have gone live on the EHR, with the remaining three hospitals expected to be online in 2008.

In preparation for a go-live, Johnson and her team spend a lot of time onsite helping clinical and revenue cycle employees prepare for the system. Being a change leader is a major role in this large project, Johnson says, as is making sure the system is integrated enterprise-wide and within each individual hospital. "Our end goal is truly one patient, one record-systemwide," she says.

Working with Legal

Part of Johnson's role is ensuring the EHR system is operable for everyone who needs to use it, including attorneys. Johnson's team collaborates with Allina's legal department on a variety of issues in an effort to ensure its system stores and prints records in a legally sound manner.

For example, after initially hearing concerns from attorneys about the volume and organization of the printed version of the electronic legal record, Johnson and her team worked closely with the EHR system vendor to enhance the printed record's format and length. They also focused on ensuring the printed record depicts the chronological sequence of events that occur during a hospital encounter.

HIM Experience Produces Useful Management Skills

When Johnson returns to work from maternity leave this summer, her role will change to focus on the implementation of EHR system upgrades. "The upgrade will have more than just software implications. Significant training and workflow implications will need to be addressed prior to implementation," Johnson says.

Transitioning into an integrated EHR project manager role was easy, Johnson says, thanks to her HIM training and experience. "HIM professionals are inherently organized and can see the big picture," she says. "They understand the importance of hospital-wide system integration and its impact on the overall delivery of care."

Helping Save Lives

Although the hours can be long, Johnson says she takes pride in knowing her work implementing Allina's EHR contributes to high-quality patient care. "That is the key that keeps me going, that's exciting," she says.

When word gets back that the EHR is making a difference, Johnson knows all that hard work delivering the system has paid off.

“We have heard success stories that attribute saved lives to the critical health information available in an emergency,” she says. “In the electronic world, we have instant access to patient health information that may not have been available prior to the EHR.”

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