Developing Shared Electronic Health Record with Virginia Mason

What patients at Virginia Mason Memorial and Virginia Mason have in common is high quality health care. What they don't have in common - yet - is a shared electronic health record (EHR). That's why work to extend the Cerner EHR platform to Virginia Mason Memorial is well underway.

The Information Systems and Informatics teams at both organizations have been working together since February to plan the technical rollout of Cerner EHR on our main hospital campus. The plan also includes implementation of new Cerner functionality, such as applications for the Emergency Department.

Upon approval by the System Integration Council in July, teams from IS, Informatics and Clinical Operations went to work on the implementation. The Informatics team began side-by-side comparisons of workflows between Cerner and our current platform. While we have service lines that Virginia Mason Seattle doesn't, such as inpatient pediatrics, behavioral health and obstetrics, the majority of our processes have a workable transition route to Cerner.

"There is a real synergy developing with the Clinical Informatics teams at both hospitals. We are working side-by-side on everything and it is reassuring to see that many of our processes are similar," says Allen Kautzman, Clinical Informatics Supervisor.

Why is integrating EHR platforms between organizations so critical? As patients increasingly move between our hospital and clinics, all providers must be able to view and contribute to one comprehensive patient record. Drawing on the same set of EHR tools, with a consistent look and feel, is essential for smooth handoffs and care transitions with providers practicing in multiple locations. The goal is to assure timely availability of accurate information to the clinical teams in order to provide high quality, safe care to every patient, every visit, regardless of where they are seen. Also, a shared EHR will allow patients using the patient portal access to their complete health information.

With a launch target of October 2017, teams from IT, Informatics, Clinical Operations and Cerner will engage in more than 100 "sprints," or intensive two-week sessions running concurrently to design, build and test multiple facets of the system. The sprint process will give people hands-on experience and a group of super users will be ready before training begins. Extension of the Cerner EHR represents a new work experience for the IS team, and they're excited to take it on.

On the informatics side, the change-management piece has been identified as one of the most important aspects of the work. Key elements will include strong, visible leadership during the integration; clear, consistent communication throughout the design and build; and continual engagement with teams so everyone is prepared for what's next. It's a road map that will serve the teams well when Cerner is extended to all Virginia Mason Memorial ambulatory clinics in the project's second phase, slated for 2018.

Leveraging Cerner technology and having one integrated health record directly ties to our Strategic Focus Area of Knowledge Management and supports our Vision to "create healthy communities one person at a time."

This article is an introduction to the process as we work to bring Cerner online at Virginia Mason Memorial. Stay tuned for additional updates as we get closer to the launch date.