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BOSTON HOSPITAL EYES IMPROVED WORKFLOW THROUGH AUTOMATED REFERRALS

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Boston hospital eyes improved workflow through automated referrals

August 17, 2009 | Eric Wicklund, Managing Editor



Boston Medical Center

BOSTON – Boston Medical Center is projected to generate an additional \$7 million each year by automating – and thereby improving – its referral process.

The 575-bed hospital, the primary teaching affiliate for Boston University's School of Medicine, went live in May with eReferral, a portal-based

referral management solution developed by the Scottsdale, Ariz.-based Carefx Corp. According to hospital officials, the solution has helped the hospital improve scheduled referrals by 20 percent, reduce no-shows by 5 percent and increase referrals by roughly 100 a day, or 10 percent growth.

"eReferral has helped our patients obtain appropriate, hassle-free care, and our resource utilization has been optimized due to a decrease in missed clinic appointments," said Meg Aranow, vice president and CIO at BMC. "Quality, safety and physician satisfaction have increased, and the system architecture will serve as a foundation for other collaborative messaging between physicians in the community and the specialty clinics at the hospital.

Built on Carefx's Fusionfx portal framework, eReferral is designed to manage referring physician communications by enhancing referral lists and tracking and proving quick access to the electronic medical record. The platform also accommodates rapid scheduling, insurance integration and reporting and offers patient-friendly summaries and provider dictionaries.

"Carefx's eReferral addresses the business goals and challenges of healthcare executives," said Qi Li, MD, Carefx's vice president of clinical strategies. "CEOs seek to improve outcomes, ensure access and minimize exposure and disruptions. COOs need eReferral to prioritize higher value units, strengthen referrals and utilize nurses consistently. CFOs see eReferral as a tactic to ensure payment, reduce no-shows and enhance revenues. And, CMOs are eager to use eReferral to preserve patient safety, reduce errors and generate quality data for reporting purposes."

Company and hospital officials see the referral process as ripe for improvement through automation. Physicians complain that patients sometimes fail to follow up on referrals in a timely matter or skip the appointments altogether, while patients say the referral process can be long, confusing and fraught with inaccurate information. According to the Journal Pediatrics, a recent study of primary care physicians indicated those who receive accurate referral information provide optimum care in 96 out of 100 cases, compared to 35 percent for those who don't receive referral information.

"Automation of the patient referral process, more often a disjointed and cumbersome workflow, is a critical capability of a clinical portal or HIE solution," said Barry Runyon, research vice president at Gartner Healthcare Providers. "It is of particular value when it leverages existing hospital, physician and payer systems and has strong tracking and reporting capabilities."

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