A Best-of-Breed Approach in Labor & Delivery:

CHOOSING THE RIGHT IT SYSTEM

BY EVAN GODT

Healthcare CIOs often find themselves in a balancing act. While they want to have as many applications on the same database as possible, they also must be responsive to the needs of busy users on the floor. Focused, best-of-breed information systems and integrated enterprise systems each have their advantages, but is there an option that provides both robust core functionality and integration of all essential data? Yes, there is.
WEIGHING THE OPTIONS
When deciding on a healthcare IT strategy, the choice between a best-of-breed system and an enterprise system may appear to be one of functionality and interoperability. On the surface at least, CIOs are picking between focused solutions or an enterprise EMR (electronic medical record) solution that claims to be a jack of all trades.

The key elements are workflow, patient care and the level of interaction with the hospital enterprise as a whole. A patient who is in a car accident, for example, will arrive in the ED and then may require surgery. After surgery, the patient returns to the floor under the care of a hospitalist, with follow-up visits from orthopedic surgeons or other specialists. It’s in these types of scenarios, with a patient traveling to multiple departments and interacting with multiple different clinicians needing access to the patient record, that an enterprise EMR may sound like the preferred option. But a best-of-breed solution that integrates with an EMR can address the same need, while providing more robust functionality for the clinicians and in the specialty departments.

For Andy Draper, CIO for Hospital Corporation of America (HCA) Gulf Coast Division in Houston, the advantages of an enterprise solution aren’t as strong in labor and delivery as the advantages of a best-of-breed solution. Parents in the labor and delivery department don’t often interact with the rest of the hospital. Even in cases where there’s crossover between labor and delivery and other medical departments—a mother receiving treatment for hypertension, for example—data from a best-of-breed perinatal information system can be interfaced with the enterprise’s EMR, says Draper.

The balance is deciding whether the organization needs a full-blown integrated EMR, or can we trade that off and get better functionality in a focused best-of-breed application... and interface it in. That’s the decision HCA has made.”

Andy Draper, CIO, Hospital Corporation of America (HCA) Gulf Coast Division, Houston

“DEDICATED TO LABOR & DELIVERY
HCA has been using GE Healthcare’s Centricity Perinatal software as a best-of-breed solution in labor and delivery for 20 years, according to Draper. “It’s built for the labor and delivery unit. It’s built for the nursing workflow,” he says.

Because HCA’s EMR did not have a robust module for labor and delivery, the organization made Centricity Perinatal the standard across the enterprise. All HCA hospitals support a common clinical documentation and database design. Centricity Perinatal fields and elements are standardized so when a nurse enters lab data, that data can be extracted from all the different databases, which Draper says offers a huge analytics opportunity.

Centricity Perinatal can interface with anything that accepts HL7, including all major enterprise and ambulatory EMR systems. At HCA’s Gulf Coast Division hospitals, Centricity Perinatal is interfaced with the enterprise EMR to send labor and delivery summaries, care plans, current admission summaries, newborn coding summaries and newborn worksheets. Discharge instructions and other discrete data to support meaningful use also are interfaced between labor and delivery and the enterprise system.

Shore Medical Center in Somers Point, N.J., is another organization using Centricity Perinatal that made the decision to go best of breed in labor and delivery based on that department’s very specific workflow and defined timelines. Fred Banner, vice president and CIO for Shore Medical Center, says: “We saw very little risk but a lot of value with the best-of-breed approach.”

Like HCA, Shore recognized the importance of interfacing labor and delivery with the enterprise and supporting meaningful use. Going forward, Banner says Shore will con-
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continue to tightly integrate data with the organization’s ambulatory EMR and their upcoming health information organization initiative in 2013.

Documentation is another key feature for any healthcare software. User interfaces should be intuitive, with customizable documentation. Draper says Centricity Perinatal offered these features, especially when it came to documentation on the fetal strip. Clinical events, such as the administration of Pitocin or other medications during labor, can easily be documented by nursing staff on the fetal monitoring strip, and these are the data that physicians want to see.

The application also can automatically populate the infant record with relevant information related to the mother’s pregnancy and delivery. Alerts and reminders can notify users of site-specific clinical protocols and can link to online references or preferred databases to enable compliance with hospital guidelines.

CULTURAL INITIATIVES

IT plays a role in every decision made at Shore Medical Center, says Banner. “These initiatives are not seen as IT initiatives, they’re seen as organizational initiatives supported by stakeholders.”

Banner says IT staff need to have “skin in the game” with every implementation and all decisions must be made as part of a team effort with clinicians, administration and other stakeholders. He views department staff not simply as users of software, but as owners. With this dedication to making sure everybody is onboard with a new software strategy, IT projects have become more about partnerships, leadership and cultural change than the technology itself.

With this in mind, the search for a new IT system should bring every stakeholder to the table during discussions, planning, site visits or technical demonstrations. All potential software must meet departmental standards and the expectations of users. It must fit the culture of the department and the strategic vision of the organization. Aside from the software itself, the technology vendor also should be evaluated by looking at market share and staying power within the industry.

It was through this process that Shore Medical Center staff determined the tools of the enterprise model didn’t provide what the organization needed. They decided on Centricity Perinatal due to its core functionality and user friendly interface.

But choosing the IT system is just the beginning. “The selection and evaluation of these tools is the easy part. It’s the fun part,” says Banner. To truly benefit from these tools, he says the selection process must be followed by a fundamental change in the way business is conducted.

“If an organization is expecting that they can go buy any enterprise application or any best-of-breed application and implement it and do things the way they did, No. 1 I think they’ll find that model will not work. And No. 2, they’ll fail to achieve the benefits that application brings to the table,” says Banner.

Application specialists who reside in the unit are an essential piece of the puzzle. These super users can help others in the department get up to speed with any new direction taken with regard to IT initiatives.

Having an effective model to implement IT changes will be imperative in healthcare. Banner says the only thing that appears to be certain in the healthcare industry is change, and the pace of that change has only accelerated in recent years. There are growing demands on IT and the need for information. Regulations are shifting the playing field and new technologies are being developed all the time, causing shifts in user expectations. And forward-thinking organizations are focused on the future of meaningful use.

“The model is serving us very well as we move forward,” says Banner.

Fortunately for CIOs and health IT leaders facing these new demands, their balancing act has gotten a lot easier. With best-of-breed options like Centricity Perinatal that offer methods to interface with other systems, the choice is no longer between functionality and interoperability. Now IT can offer the tools to deliver and access key data at the point of care and make users happy, while also fully connecting with the enterprise.

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