Rapidly Creating an EHR Extension Strategy Through a Consulting Partnership

With continual changes in the healthcare provider space, organizations are looking to ensure alignment with their community provider practices and hospitals. There is added pressure to meet Meaningful Use, form Accountable Care Organizations and Clinically Integrated Networks, and manage the transition of current payment models from fee-for-service to value-based compensation. The desire for alignment often results in acquisitions, but for the organizations who wish to remain independent—or when acquisition is not a good fit—close collaboration and shared service models can be very effective and beneficial for both parties.

For Greenville Health System (GHS)—the largest health system in South Carolina—this meant discussing other options with neighboring Self Regional Healthcare. The focus of the partnership was to extend GHS’s electronic health record and ancillary third-party offerings as part of a managed services offering.

GHS and Self Regional are part of a regional ACO called MyHealth First Network (MyHFN). “Because of that strategic partnership, and the fact that we’re in the ACO and contracting for shared risk, it was a natural fit to tie our operations more closely together,” says Jay Hansen, regional information services director for GHS.

GHS had already contracted with Epic to implement its EHR and was in the midst of implementation. Self Regional had a longstanding relationship with another vendor, but it had recently begun the selection process for a new solution. The timing for discussions about a shared services model was right, and GHS began discussing its ability to extend its instance of Epic and other ancillary systems to Self Regional.

In the midst of an Epic implementation, GHS was looking for ways to increase efficiency and decentralize management functions, including information services, across its seven hospitals. Hansen explains, “I was tasked with trying to figure out what that model would look like, and at the same time was tasked with helping to roll out our Community Connect program.”

These strategic goals aligned in December of 2014. Hansen and other GHS information services leaders opted to partner with outside experts to facilitate the transition for both GHS and Self Regional. Time was limited for this process because Self Regional had already begun moving forward with replacing its current EHR and required time for budgeting, negotiation, approval, and integration.

As members of MyHealth First Network, GHS and Self Regional understood that a partnership made sense, but they would need help creating agreements and strategic plans.

Although GHS could have completed such a transition on a smaller scale, the organization needed assistance developing and overseeing a transition of this magnitude. Seeking support for this process, GHS considered a number of top consulting firms, but ultimately decided to work with Sagacious Consultants.

Selecting a Business Partner and Setting Scope for the Engagement

“What swayed us toward Sagacious was their experience and being Best in KLAS in this space, which meant a great deal to us,” says Hansen. “They also had the depth of having come from Epic, and because of that, they have a really detailed knowledge of the product. To get to the level of specificity we needed, we really wanted someone who had implemented and understood Epic very well.”

Sagacious Supported the Project in a Number of Ways:

1. First, they assisted in the development of structures between GHS and Self Regional. As a large healthcare organization, Self Regional already had its own IT team, and in its partnership with GHS, wanted to retain that team and its primary IT support. Consequently, a collaborative relationship that allowed for partnership between the two organizations was imperative. Sagacious also provided detailed recommendations for implementing Epic to accommodate growth and enable future connections with healthcare partners.

2. Sagacious likewise guided GHS through the process of identifying which aspects of the EHR would be configured...