

Health Departments Experience Increased Patient Care with Michigan State Lab Integration

Patagonia Health Creates First EHR Interface with the MI State Lab

CHALLENGE

Health departments across the country need to connect to outside organizations for continuity of care, including labs, HIEs, and hospital systems. In the past, Michigan health departments connected to Michigan State Labs through a manual process. It took a long time to send and receive records, and a manual process opened them up for potential errors in patient records when entered into more than one system separately.

Julie Baker, Health Data Specialist from Michigan's Midland County Health Department, says, "We would receive results from the State lab via fax. If we had an error on a form, that would then delay the test results for the patient."

This manual workflow created duplicate work, according to Angela Havekost from the Monroe County Health Department. "There were a lot of duplicate results being faxed. Electronic Test Orders and Results (ETOR) was good but time-consuming, and would sometimes get lost in the shuffle of a busy clinic day. We would have to double-chart on all of our outgoing labs."

Paint Points Before Implementing the Integration:

- ▶ **Slow Communication:** Sending and receiving lab results via fax was time-consuming, delaying patient care.
- ▶ **Manual Data Entry Errors:** Entering information into multiple systems increased the risk of errors in patient records.
- ▶ **Duplicate Work:** Staff had to double-chart outgoing labs, adding to their workload and reducing efficiency.
- ▶ **Lost or Misplaced Lab Results:** Electronic Test Orders and Results (ETOR) sometimes got lost during busy clinic days.
- ▶ **Delays Due to Form Errors:** Mistakes on paper forms caused delays in processing lab tests and receiving results.

SOLUTION

Patagonia Health created the first and only EHR interface to the Michigan State Lab. Records are received and sent in the correct format, directly to and from the EHR. Health Department staff no longer need to use paper records or fax machines to communicate with the Michigan State Lab.

The Patagonia Health team works with the Michigan State Lab regularly to ensure the test and production environments are running smoothly. The Michigan State Lab provides User Acceptance Training sessions where a member of the Patagonia Health team attends. “[The Patagonia Health representative is] good at giving direction to the end user from the Health Department on placing orders and being able to use the functionality of the Patagonia Health System,” says Julie Kusey, Laboratory Systems Section Manager of the Michigan State Lab.

RESULTS

Administrative Time Saved

Clinics experienced fewer manual errors and faster processing times via the Michigan State Lab integration. They were able to exchange patient data more quickly, leading to expedited care. Midland County and Monroe County Health Departments both reported that the interface has saved them 5-10 minutes per patient, which adds up over the year.

Benefits of the Michigan State Lab Integration:

- ▶ **Time Savings:** Both Midland and Monroe County Health Departments report saving 5–10 minutes per patient, significantly adding up over time.
- ▶ **Faster Processing:** Clinics experience quicker data exchange and lab result processing, leading to more timely patient care.
- ▶ **Reduced Manual Errors:** Automation has minimized manual entry and the risk of related errors.
- ▶ **Workflow Efficiency:** Staff now receive lab results directly in the Patagonia Health EHR, eliminating the need for scanning and manual form completion.

Staff's day-to-day workflows have transformed as they get results sent automatically into the Patagonia Health EHR. "We no longer have to scan results into a patient's chart, which has saved time for our clerical staff," says Baker. She continues, "We were spending extra time completing forms, which are now sent electronically to the State lab. We no longer worry about that since it is all pulled right from our EHR. These results are now transferred directly into the EHR, which has been a wonderful change for us. We no longer have to worry about a fax machine being down and results not coming."

Havekost agrees, saying, "It has also made the preparation of sending the labs out much easier, since we print our PRs out at the time of order, so they are already done and waiting with the samples to be shipped."

Clinic Efficiency Enhanced

Clinic efficiency has increased. "We have more time to focus on follow-up, or be more flexible with walk-in appointments because we are not doing all the extra legwork with the ordering and receiving of labs," says Havekost.

This seamless integration facilitates faster patient information exchange and allows Michigan's public health departments to provide better care for their communities. "We have been live for a couple months now, and I can see how this could increase our patient capacity in the future," says Baker.

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Julie Baker

Midland County Health Department

The Michigan State Lab noted, “They are getting results in a more timely manner, and not having to wait on us to sift through the stacks of faxes we used to receive.”

Patient Satisfaction Increased

Kusey says when the Health departments get the lab results faster, they can treat patients sooner. Midland County reports, “Our patients are seeing a faster turnaround on their lab results and are also able to view these in their patient portal.”

Havekost continues, saying that she could even see this interface helping more patients receive care in a potential community outbreak situation. “We have not had the opportunity to use it for outbreak purposes; however, I can see where utilizing this interface will make the task much simpler, organized, and easy to keep track of.”

Communication Improved

The interface process with Patagonia Health includes a collaborative partnership between ourselves, the client, and the third-party vendor. “The Patagonia Health integration of these HL7 projects has allowed for a better partnership with the State of Michigan and the Health Departments,” says Kusey.

“Communication has improved by having more dialogue between us and the Health Departments about workflows, test requirements, etc. that previously would not have occurred, leading to it being more personable.”

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Julie Baker
Midland County Health Department

CONCLUSION

The integration of the Patagonia Health EHR with the Michigan State Lab has significantly improved the efficiency, accuracy, and speed of lab result processing for Michigan's local health departments. Clinics no longer rely on outdated fax systems, reducing manual errors and administrative burden.

Health Departments say the transition to the new system was smooth and well-supported. "The transition training period was well organized and easy to follow," says Havekost. "[The Patagonia Health staff] were always available for questions, and prompt with answers."

Our interfaces team has extensive experience in implementing interfaces to public health departments across the country. Baker says, "The staff were courteous and knew exactly how to implement this between the State and our office."



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