



Patagonia Health Improves Reimbursement Turnaround, Eases Patient Scheduling, and Drives Workflow Efficiencies for Multi-County Public Health Department



BACKGROUND

As Health Director of the Appalachian District Health Department, Beth Lovette, MPH, RN, continuously works to improve patient care within the public health system covering Alleghany, Ashe and Watauga counties in the northwestern region of North Carolina.

Recently she'd been faced with mounting frustration with an antiquated, paper-based system requiring practice personnel to rekey patient data multiple times across multiple screens and a cumbersome and slow billing system. As a result, Lovette sought the counsel of the local Office of Rural Health for a recommendation of an electronic medical health (EHR) system to automate many of their manual processes and create operational efficiencies.

After conferring with the rural health center and a community care consulting physician who had evaluated a number of commercially available EHRs, the decision was made to implement the Patagonia Health integrated EHR, practice management and billing solution. Patagonia Health ranked very high in terms of technology and support, and they were able to offer a competitive price point for the fully integrated EHR solution.

SOLUTIONS

The Patagonia Health integrated EHR solution is an easy-to-use platform specifically designed with the needs of public health agencies, behavioral health organizations and private medical practices in mind.

Based on the company's extensive experience working with health departments, Patagonia Health has built unique apps that assist in areas such as family planning and maternal health that are included in its integrated EHR solution to meet the needs of this sector. These apps allow agencies such as the Appalachian District Health Department to improve overall workflow, increase efficiency, comply with Meaningful Use standards and gain instant access to financial data within the system.

PROCESS

The Appalachian District Health Department began implementing Patagonia Health during August of its 2012 fiscal year. The Department first rolled out the Practice Management portion of the integrated EHR solution to its Ashe County practice. Once the application was up and running, the department rolled out Practice Management to Alleghany and Watauga counties. The department then rolled out the Billing portion to complete the full EHR solution within Ashe, Alleghany and Watauga counties. Lovette estimates the department has approximately 45 users across all three counties including practice managers, nurses, providers and others.

KEY BENEFITS

- Improved workflow and efficiencies
- Faster reimbursement
- Meaningful Use data



"In public health, we have a lot of responsibilities that extend beyond traditional patient care," said Lovette. "For example, our needs require a higher number of users per provider than a private practice—almost double."

For Lovette, this can present some very unique challenges such as adoption rates, training and learning curves. In her experience, some of the department's newer employees coming from private practice are more likely to have experience with EHR systems and have been Patagonia Health's earliest adopters and advocates. Lovette notes that if a particular function in the system is reportedly "not working" in one county, but is working without issues in the other two, it's most likely a training issue or user error.

"It has been a big learning curve for some of our providers and staff to go from a largely paper-based office to electronic," Lovette stated. "While the processes and workflow are not yet perfect, we're committed to Patagonia Health and this product."

BENEFITS

Lovette breaks down Patagonia Health's most valuable benefits into two categories: Practice management and health benefits. She also notes these basic, yet crucial benefits to the successful operational function of a public health department:

- **Improved workflow and efficiencies:** Department personnel and providers no longer have to repeatedly rekey patient data across multiple screens, which makes scheduling patients easier.
- **Faster reimbursement:** The billing system is very easy to use, making the process of billing to 3rd party insurance companies faster and more efficient, allowing the turnaround time in getting reimbursement to speed up significantly.
- **Meaningful Use data:** Lovette looks forward to reaching the point with Patagonia Health where the department can leverage Meaningful Use data to improve quality care issues including preventative health, chronic care, etc.



"Overall, the implementation of the Patagonia Health integrated EHR solution has highlighted a myriad of additional opportunities for our Department to operate more efficiently and improve our entire workflow. This has been a very challenging process for us to figure out, but I look at this as an opportunity to do things better instead of the same way we've always done things."

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